

Perry Rhodan 072 The Ambassadors From Aurigel 1/ MISSION: PEEP "I'm worried," Wee-Nii emphasized with his high-pitched squeaky voice. "Why did the ship stop reporting?" Wee-Nii was almost 21/2 meters tall and very thin. His appearance indicated that he belonged to the privileged class of the nobility. Only for noblemen who had never performed physical work was it possible to grow so tall and slim. Those others who had to toil were never permitted by nature to grow taller than 2 meters and had to keep their girth under 60 centimetres. The man with whom Wee-Nii talked was of the same stature: Fij-Gul, Airfleet Officer of his Excellency the President-King. He was rather young and apparently little inclined to share Wee-Nii's concern. "What could've happened?" asked Fij-Gul somewhat derisively. "The transmitter could've broken down or something like that. I don't believe there's any cause for apprehension." Wee-Nii made an uncertain gesture with the spidery fingers of his hands. "Believing isn't good enough," he objected. "We've got to know! And knowledge is precisely what we lack. Capt. Sey-Wuun has given us only very scanty hints about the inhabitants of that planet. He considered them to be completely harmless. He even told us that it is fairly easy to find traitors among them who are willing to collaborate with us for their own advantage; but otherwise we don't know very much." "Except that we depend on them to deliver grain to us," Fij-Gul added. The admiral agreed with an emphatic gesture. "Yes indeed! His Excellency must have valid reasons for limiting the rations of the Airfleet so drastically. If Sey-Wuun doesn't come back within 10 days we'll have to ask His Excellency for an advance delivery because our men'll no longer have anything to eat." Fij-Gul walked over to the window and looked out at the city with its high-pointed towers and deep gorges of streets. "Sey-Wuun'll come back, you may be sure of that," he tried to calm his superior. "There's nothing those primitive people can do to him." We-Nii spread his fingers again. "We don't even know if they're really so primitive," he argued. "Sey-Wuun has sighted the wreck of a large vehicle lying in the vicinity of their town. The agent he has won over assured him it was a spaceship in which the strangers had come to Weelie-Wee. Sey-Wuun gave orders to inspect it but his men didn't seem to understand much about it. They demolished some equipment to prevent the aliens from ever using it again but... well, I don't know. In any case, I'd be glad to hear again from Sey-Wuun." Fij-Gul thought for a moment. "And if we don't hear from him," he asked, "what are we going to do?" Wee-Nii looked at him, distraught. "I'm asking myself the same question. The wing of our Airfleet which serves in outer space consists of only 3 vessels which are in a class with Sey-Wuun's ship. If he has suffered an accident and doesn't come back with his ship, we have only 2 spaceships left. Would it be wise to send one of them to Weelie-Wee and run the risk that the aliens destroy or capture it too or whatever else they've done?" Fij-Gul demurred. "I don't think we should assume that the aliens are responsible if Sey-Wuun fails to return. I've heard his report. In his opinion there are only a few thousand poor fools living on Weelie-Wee who've got trouble to keep themselves alive. If anything happened to his ship, it must have occurred during the flight. Perhaps it collided with a meteor or something like that. If these were the true circumstances, we would undoubtedly send a 2nd vessel to Weelie-Wee. Don't you think?" Wee-Nii heaved a sigh. "I hope you're right, Fij," he replied, "but I'm afraid you indulge in wishful thinking. You'd like to get your own command of a long-distance ship, wouldn't you?" If Fij-Gul was embarrassed he didn't show a sign of it. "I don't deny," he said, "that I'm very anxious to obtain such a command. But regardless of this, I've good reasons to think that my judgment is objective. According to all the facts we know about the aliens, they're in no position to attack a heavily-armed and fully-manned spaceship of His Excellency's Airfleet, let alone destroy it." "According to all we know," Wee-Nii repeated thoughtfully, mocking Fij-Gul a little at the same time. "If I knew for sure you were right I'd have no objections to giving you a ship and letting you fly to Weelie-Wee. The trouble is that I don't have the

facts." "Of course it's a donkish name," Chellish admitted, "but it's logical to call the Whistlers' home Peep. Right?" He crawled out from under the switchbox and wiped the oil, which had dripped on him while he worked underneath, from his face with his hand. "I don't really care what you call it," O'Bannon muttered. "I only thought it would look funny if they ever list the name Peep in a star catalogue." From beneath the switchbox Chellish said, "I'm almost done." "Done?" O'Bannon asked incredulously. "Do you mean to say this crate is ready to fly again?" "It'll be as good as new," Chellish assured him. "We'll be able to fly to Peep and whop the Whistlers on the head." "You're a rascal," O'Bannon said admiringly. "Not I," Chellish retorted. "But the Whistlers are real donks." "Why?" "They just took some hammers and started banging away," Chellish replied emerging once more. "They had no idea which the essential components of the machinery are. They must be totally ignorant of this type of propulsion. They knocked a few holes and made some dents but caused no serious damage. That's why I was able to fix it so quickly." "Hm!" O'Bannon grunted. Mullon had parked the helicopter in the big cargo-hatch of the Adventurous. The hatch-door was one of the few parts of the wreck which still functioned after the explosion of the atom bomb had rocked the ship again. There was no dangerous radiation inside the wreck. Mullon and Chellish had checked over the vessel with a radiation counter before they undertook the task of repairing the auxiliary ship of the Adventurous. They had found that it was not necessary to wear anti-radiation suits to protect them. Already after the first cursory inspection Chellish had claimed that the damage caused by the Whistlers was minor and could be remedied in less than 10 days. Now it was the 8th day and Chellish had promised to finish the job today. Inside the cavernous hatch there was little light because the outer door had to be kept closed due to the radioactive dust whirled around by the wind outside. Chellish had hung up a portable lamp near the entrance in order to facilitate the manoeuvre of the helicopter. The shine of the lamp was barely enough to recognize the spherical hull of the auxiliary ship berthed in the rear of the hatch on sliding rails. All Mullon could see from the helicopter was a huge dark shadow which looked very eerie. As Mullon waited for Chellish's and O'Bannon's return his mind dwelled once again on the opinion stated by Capt. Blailey who was standing by in a long-distance reconnaissance ship of the Gazelle type up in the mountains with orders from the Terranian Spacefleet to watch over the colonists and to save their necks if they were threatened by a crippling disaster. "I consider your plan very reckless," Blailey had declared, mincing no words. "On the other hand, your entire existence is in jeopardy and in such a case it is quite understandable why you think up schemes that would give you goose-pimples under normal conditions. Nevertheless, you might get away with it if you're clever, but don't expect any support from Terra. If you run into tough luck on the planet of the Whistlers, you'll be strictly on your own. Terra wants to establish a base for our Spacefleet on their planet and one of these days the Terranian spaceships will visit them but I doubt that this will be at the same time that you need help to get out of trouble." Mullon was rather glad to hear Blailey's words 2 weeks earlier. It had bothered him that Capt. Blailey waited in his Gazelle in the background and expected to extricate the colonists if they got themselves into a mess. The mission against the Whistlers was their own business and they wanted nobody to intervene, regardless of how well meaning they were. Confound it! Mullon realized that this was a rather puerile attitude but he felt that everybody-including Chellish-shared his mood and therefore had no qualms. He was quite satisfied with Blailey's admonishments and his announcement that the Gazelle had no intention of interfering with their trip to Peep. At worst it would imperil the lives of 10 or 15 men; this was all who were going to participate in the venture and they would take their own chances in the game. He was startled from his thoughts when he saw Chellish and O'Bannon emerge from the shadow of the auxiliary ship. As they approached the helicopter with quick steps, O'Bannon called from afar: "Got anything to whet our whistle, Horace? We're thirsty!" "Oh yeah?"

Mullon replied good-humouredly. "I bet you didn't even lift a finger." He looked at Chellish after they had joined him and noticed that he appeared to be pleased although he could barely see his face, so smeared by dirty oil it was. "Is the ship alright?" he asked O'Bannon. "It's fine," Chellish confirmed. "We can get aboard and take off." Mullon raised his hand and warned: "Not yet; first we've got to get those makeshift bombs ready." Chellish laughed. "I've got all the confidence in the world in Wolley and his men. They've made very good progress during these last days." Wolley cursed profusely. "We're lucky that we don't have any newspapers on Grautier. People would laugh if somebody tried to tell them this is supposed to be a rocket with an atomic warhead." Chellish and Mullon were amused by his angry outburst. "I'm a first-class mechanic; at least that's what people always told me on Earth," Wolley claimed. "But this blasted thing here... I'd just as soon have nothing to do with it." The thing had indeed not the slightest resemblance to the rocket which it was supposed to be. Instead of looking like a sleek, torpedo-shaped missile, it resembled a garbage can more than anything else. There were no stubwings or stabilizing fins. The container holding the bomb on top of the contraption looked like a bucket somebody had thrown away. The other end was open and inside a battery-driven electric motor could be seen and a gadget similar to a ventilator. "What matters is that the gyroscope functions properly." Chellish patted Wolley on the shoulder, trying to calm him a little. "You don't have to worry much about the rest. This thing is going to be used only in empty space where you can forget all about aerodynamic contours. "Oh, shucks!" Wolley muttered scratching his head. The next man Chellish and Mullon went to see after coming back from the wreck of the Adventurous was Dr. Ashbury, a physician who now had become a chemist by force of circumstances. Ashbury was entrusted with the task of making enough oxyhydrogen gas to propel Wolley's garbage can rocket with reasonable speed. To produce oxyhydrogen gas was not too difficult. Ashbury broke down water into its chemical components and filled separate containers with the oxygen and hydrogen. It would be far trickier to put the gases into Wolley's rocket and to put them under pressure. After their visit at Ashbury's, Mullon invited Chellish to have dinner at his house, where they could find out what progress the 'commando team' had made. When they reached Mullon's house they saw Freddy, Mullon's wife, through the window, walking up and down the room gesticulating her arms; and when they entered the door of the house they could hear her pleading voice: "Expressions of belief, ignorance, doubt and so forth are followed by the subjunctive form of conjugation! Subjunctive! When are you going to get this through your thick skulls, gentlemen?" Mullon opened the door leading into her room and was astounded to see nobody in the room except Freddy. Chellish grinned. "You must have dressed down your students once too often. They preferred to leave." "Oh no," she replied, annoyed. "I'm only practicing. These donkheads always make mistakes and I don't have the heart to reprimand them. So I've got to practice being stem like a teacher in school." Mullon slouched in a chair. "Is it that bad?" Freddy dismissed it with a gesture of her hand. "Not really. They've learned more in 2 weeks than pupils on Earth in 2 years. They're quite enthusiastic about it. Of course, nobody can learn to speak perfect French in only 4 weeks." "But it won't be necessary to speak flawlessly," Chellish replied. "As long as the Whistlers hear another language than the one they already know. In most cases it'll be sufficient if only 2 or 3 men talk. My pronunciation leaves something to be desired but my grammar isn't too bad." Freddy looked at him critically and changed the subject. "Are you going to freeload again here tonight?" she asked gruffly. Chellish nodded. "Yes. I'm a poor devil who's got to mooch where he can." "Did you do any good today?" "Of course. I fixed a whole spaceship." "So that it can fly again?" "Exactly," Chellish replied. Freddy suddenly was serious. "I know I should be happy about it but I can't make myself feel elated. How do I know that all this will end well?" Mullon got up and put his arms around her shoulders. "Wait and see," he comforted her.

"We'll be back in 2 months after raising so much hell among the Whistlers that they'll lose all desire to ever come back to Grautier." ... 3 months had elapsed since the explosion of the atom bomb had destroyed the spaceship of the Whistlers and now the expedition was ready to take off with 13 men. A great deal of preparation had gone into the expedition. The repair of the auxiliary ship, which had been given the name Fair Lady; Wolley's trouble with the garbage can rockets, of which he had built 2; and Ashbury's concern with the infusion of the oxyhydrogen mixture were only some of the problems that had to be solved before the start. The settlers of Greenwich on the Green River now had 2 atom bombs available. They were made with the fissionable material taken from the reactors of the agricultural multipurpose machines furnished by the Whistlers. The nuclear material of 4 more reactors had to be stripped for the construction of Wolley's rockets to be taken aboard the Fair Lady. A permanent radio connection with Capt. Blailey's Gazelle up in the mountains had been established so that Blailey could be kept informed during the time of Lt. Chellish's absence on Peep. Neither Blailey nor Greenwich would have any contact with Chellish on his mission but Blailey would still be in a position to come to the aid of the town in case of an attack. A new script was developed as Chellish assumed that the Whistlers had not only learned something about their language but also a little about the writing and printing of the colonists. He didn't want to arouse their suspicion by using the same letters for the name of the spaceship on its spherical hull. All members of the team were instructed to write in the new style whenever they had to put down something in writing. During the last days after Dr. Ashbury had overcome the difficulties of filling the fuel tanks of the rocket bomb with oxygen and hydrogen he became involved in many more requests by Chellish who wished to take a great number of other chemical concoctions on his trip. His demands as to quality, quantity and efficacy were far from modest. It was a remarkable feat that all these preparations could be accomplished in 3 months. What helped to do the trick was the adequate amount of technological equipment the colonists still had available after some of the cargo aboard the Adventurous had been destroyed or rendered useless by its crash landing. But even with the best of tools the preparation for the start of the Fair Lady would have taken considerably more time if the people of Greenwich had not been so dedicated to their cause. Few of them seemed to realize the risk they ran by virtually declaring war on a neighbouring planet and thereby a whole alien race. They were swayed by their outrage against the humiliation they had suffered at the hands of the Whistlers who had believed they could degrade 8,000 Terrans as slaves. However, despite the hurry with which they worked on the preparations, nothing was overlooked and everything was put in its proper place. All technical aspects were treated with such meticulous care that by all human standards a failure of the expedition was quite improbable. The evening before the start Chellish and his friends Mullon, O'Bannon and Milligan went over again every detail of their mission. Each one had been assigned a special task for outfitting the ship and the other preliminaries for the enterprise and each gave an account of the work he had accomplished. After the last one had finished his report it seemed that nothing had been forgotten. The Fair Lady lifted off early the next morning on the 16th of August of the new Grautier era. 2/ ARRIVAL ON HEENINNIY Uju-Riel was the first to see the alien spaceship. He noticed a tiny fast-moving blip on his radar screen which he first took for some kind of a freak reflex because in his opinion it was impossible for a vessel to move as rapidly as the blip indicated. Such interference reflexes usually quickly disappeared but the, point wandered across the upper area of the screen and moved out to the left edge. Uju-Riel was startled and he tried to compute the velocity of the object. The radar had picked it up at an altitude of 300 kilometres and the blip had taken about 6 seconds to get across the width of the screen. Therefore he figured that the object moved at a speed of approximately 20 kilometres per second. The only ships which could travel that fast were the interplanetaries. Yet of the 3 such vessels that existed in their world he

knew that one was at this time on a trip to Weelie-Wee under the command of Capt. Sey-Wuun and the other 2 were confined to their starting pads at Sielij and Heejii. Uju-Riel hesitated a minute but then decided to give alarm. He reported that he had observed a foreign object at an altitude of 300 kilometres which moved at a velocity of about 20 kilometres per second from northeast to southwest and that he considered it prudent to pass on this information before a disaster occurred. As everybody knew that the ship under Capt. Sey-Wuun's command couldn't possibly have returned yet, Uju-Riel's report was at first ridiculed. But half an hour later Uju-Riel observed the same radar reflex once again and this time it was close enough so that the other less sensitive instruments could pick it up as well. Moreover, the Central Electromagnetic Observation Station received at the same time an undecipherable radio message which obviously came from the foreign flying object so that Uju-Riel was vindicated and it was his turn to laugh at his superiors. Admiral Wee-Nii called a full alarm for the entire Airfleet of His Excellency the President-King and ordered the airport commanders to hold their machines ready to take off. Meanwhile Iiy-Juur-Eelie was informed about the strange incident and requested to give his instructions. However Iiy-Juur-Eelie was in no rush to issue his commands until his Fleet Admiral advised him as to all the facts he had learned about the foreign flying object and that it had radioed a message which the experts were trying to decipher with the greatest urgency. So far nothing had happened anywhere on the planet which would indicate that the unknown craft approached with hostile intentions and, finally, that it was obvious, to judge from the flight performance of the alien craft, that it was far superior to anything his own fleet could muster. It was mainly this last argument which caused Iiy-Juur-Eelie to give orders not to take any military measures against the aliens but to send signals from the airport in the vicinity of the capital asking them to land. He hoped that they would get the idea and follow his invitation. Iiy-Juur-Eelie gave no sign of being unduly worried. This would have been below his dignity as President-King. However Admiral Wee-Nii considered it his business to be concerned about such matters and he felt great apprehension. The unidentified object was apparently a visitor from outer space. It was the first time for Wee-Nii and his race that they received a visit from another world. Indeed it was the first time that they would see members of a different race. Only Sey-Wuun and his crew had met such people in the colony where they endeavoured to produce grain but they had not yet returned home to their planet. As most other people, Wee-Nii had certain expectations as to how the first visit of a stranger from the cosmos should take place. First, he imagined, they would receive some mysterious radio messages from the universe which would announce the impending visit. Then he would send one of his own spaceships to the point where the message came from in order to inspect the alien vehicle from close-by while simultaneously sounding state of alarm #1 on Heeninniy, Wee-Nii's homeworld. Finally the Airfleet of His Excellency would ceremoniously escort the alien vessel to a festive reception with a proclamation and speeches on radio and television. But what happened instead? The stranger came to Heeninniy like a thief in the night, puzzling the radar service and giving the men in charge a lesson in the inadequacy of their warning system which failed to detect the foreign ship earlier. Now the alien craft circled the entire planet like a spy before it decided to land some place. Wee-Nii was too intelligent not to realize that the mentality of the aliens didn't necessarily correspond to his own and that his personal opinions would not seem as obvious to another race. Furthermore, he could think of many explanations why a strange ship would choose such an unconventional, almost barbaric way to descend on Heeninniy without further ado. Perhaps such visits were a daily occurrence among these strangers and they thus considered any formal celebration to be unnecessary, in contrast with Wee-Nii's concept of such a noteworthy event which he shared with everybody else on Heeninniy. There was really no apparent reason to be alarmed, he concluded. "But," he said to Fij-Gul, "something doesn't look

right to me. We'll have to keep our eyes open." However Fij-Gul knew that Wee-Nii was always inclined to worry about things whether for good reasons or bad and so he didn't take the admonishment to keep his eyes open too seriously. "I got a signal!" called Sheldrake, the young man Chellish had assigned to operate the radio. His French sounded a little awkward but it was the first day that Sheldrake had to speak French exclusively. Chellish studied the signal on the oscillograph screen and noted that it showed no modulation whatsoever. It was a simple, electromagnetic impulse which was repeated at intervals of about 5 seconds. "Find out where the signal comes from," Chellish ordered. "Since everything else is quiet, I assume that it is meant for us. They probably have received our message and may give us a sign to land." His guess was soon confirmed. Sheldrake determined that the signal was emitted by some kind of a directional beam and that the transmitter was located in the vicinity of that monstrous collection of steeples which Chellish and Mullon had already identified on their first pass around Peep as the biggest of all cities on the planet. "It must be a radio beacon," Chellish concluded. "Well, let's go down!" The Fair Lady stopped at an altitude of 40 kilometres above a fairly large landing field. Chellish activated an artificial field of gravitation around the ship and it floated down as slowly as a feather. "We must give them a little time," Chellish grinned, "to prepare for our arrival. They probably are mighty surprised and frightened." The Fair Lady had covered the distance from Grautier to Peep in a few hours. Most of the way had been traversed in high relativity flight and Chellish began to think that the extreme velocity of the ship would raise considerable doubt in the minds of the Whistlers that the Fair Lady had taken off from Grautier. The distance from Grautier to Peep measured at this time almost 700 million kilometres. A ship of the Whistlers would take at least 2 months to travel such a stretch. The vessel they had dispatched to collect the harvest would normally have stayed on Grautier at least 2 months—firstly, because the wheat had not yet been brought in, secondly to give new instructions, to unload more machinery, and a number of similar reasons. If the Whistlers entertained any notion that the Fair Lady might have come from Grautier, they would have to figure that it left at a time when their own spaceship was still there, a fact which they were bound to consider highly unlikely. Chellish didn't believe that it would occur to the Whistlers that their spaceship was lost. They would probably assume instead that perhaps the transmitter broke down or that something else prevented the captain from reporting. The idea that the vessel was captured or destroyed on Grautier would be the last they'd contemplate since they were a very proud race and extremely conceited. No, there was as yet no reason to be concerned. If the Whistlers became suspicious later on, there would still be time to deal with them. Chellish concentrated his attention on the city lying below the Fair Lady. They had encountered many such buildings on their trip around the planet and an enlarged picture had made it clear that these pointed conical columns served as dwellings. The peculiar structures resembled somewhat the termite towers on Earth or the stalagmites in a subterranean cave. The Whistlers didn't seem to have a great sense of architectural beauty. The stalagmite-houses were the product of an architecture which was concerned with nothing but utility and showed no harmony at all. Chellish wondered what it looked like inside these buildings. By the time the Fair Lady had descended to a height of 8 kilometres, Chellish noticed some kind of a procession leaving the southern end of the city and moving toward the north of the landing field. "The reception committee!" Chellish exclaimed. "Now we can go down a little faster." The gravitation field, which held the Fair Lady like a protective hand and kept it from crashing to the ground, was reduced. The ship sank much quicker than before, creating a low-pressure zone in its wake into which the air rushed in with a whoosh. Iiy-Juur-Eelie thought he had good reasons to welcome the strangers with a grandiose reception. Ever since the astronomic observatories of Heeninniy had been equipped with more efficient instruments, they had received some signals which the scientists claimed came

from artificial transmitters erected by alien intelligent beings on other worlds. The observatories had classified 2 types of signals with certainty and had concluded that at least 2 other worlds existed in the neighbourhood of Heeninniy which were inhabited by intelligent beings. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was a man who looked into the future. If there were other races living in the vicinity, they would make contact with each other as soon as their own or the space technology of the aliens had developed enough. Since there seemed to exist 2 alien races, it would be wise to establish friendly relations with at least one of them. A 3-sided constellation was, according to political science, not a very stable state of affairs. Disputes could occur very easily and if he had secured himself an ally, his position would be much more favourable. Thus Iiy-Juur-Eelie had every intention of impressing the strangers with his civility so that when they returned to their home they could report they had found a valuable ally on Heeninniy. His Excellency knew very little about the adventure on which Capt. Sey-Wuun had embarked a few months ago on one of the inner planets, Weelie-Wee. According to Sey-Wuun's report, they had encountered merely a horde of primitive settlers, not an entire race. Sey-Wuun's information did not indicate that the signals received by his observatories originated from Weelie-Wee as the primitive inhabitants of that planet possessed no powerful transmitters. Therefore, Iiy-Juur-Eelie had paid only scant attention to the mission to Weelie-Wee. This was a matter under the jurisdiction of the Airfleet which had been given the task of supplying food for its members because the job of feeding the 3 billion citizens of Heeninniy became more difficult all the time. Iiy-Juur-Eelie hastened to erect some kind of a grandstand at the edge of the airfield and took his place on the highest platform with the highest dignitaries of the realm seated around him including the admirals of the Airfleet and Admiral Wee-Nii among them, as well as the high officers of the Army and Marine and the leading state officials. The grandstand was surrounded by a chain of secret police because Iiy-Juur was far from certain that all his subjects were lovingly devoted to him. His Excellency was known for his wilfulness and his ruthless methods to exercise to the hilt the power granted him under the constitution. There were rumours to the effect that he sometimes exceeded the limits of his powers and governed like a king instead of President-King as was his duty under the law. Having made all preparations to insure that the spectacle wouldn't fail to have the desired effect on the strangers, Iiy-Juur-Eelie waited for the arrival of the unknown spaceship, ostensibly patient and dignified but inwardly seething with curiosity and excitement. He could already recognize that the vessel was as big as his 3 ships of the Peei-class-the only interplanetary spaceships Heeninniy possessed-and probably much more formidable. The terrible thought crossed his mind that he might not face people who were seeking allies but came to make demands-subjugation, tributes and the like. However he put the thought aside and decided to wait and see. There was no point in scaring himself prematurely. Chellish was highly pleased with his outfit. What the women of Grautier had designed and tailored looked very respectable and handsome and, what was more important, betrayed no similarity to the style worn on Earth with which the Whistlers might already be familiar after their visit to Grautier. The Fair Lady had touched down with a spectacular vrooming noise and a heavy gust of wind whistling behind her which, to the delight of Chellish and his companions, blew into the faces of the colourful crowd on the grandstand and made their loose robes billow. Sheldrake, Loewy and Krahl had already retreated to their hideouts. Chellish had impressed on them that they couldn't dare show themselves and that they had to be absolutely sure that nobody was aboard the ship when they left their hiding place. As long as the Whistlers, who undoubtedly would come to visit the ship, failed to detect them, their presence was sufficient insurance that the Whistlers could not seize the Fair Lady in case it should come to some unpleasantness. The 3 boys knew every technical detail on the ship and could make life very miserable for the spindly creatures. The delegation that left the Fair Lady a few minutes after

the landing consisted of only 10 men. They were clothed in tight garments, reaching to their ankles, giving them the appearance of Tibetan monks. The weapons they carried were carefully concealed. Due to the gravitation of no more than 0.7 it was rather difficult to proceed with the solemnity which the situation called for. Only Chellish had already learned to adapt himself and he moved with elegant grace and a stem face. But the other 9, Mullon not excluded, had great trouble keeping pace and taking steps which were no longer than one meter. In addition the rarefied atmosphere caused them quite a bit of discomfort. The air pressure was little more than 0.5 atmospheres or about as much as on a mountain on Earth 5,000 meters high. They felt tired and were plagued by the ringing of their ears. Each quick movement—such as a hasty lifting of an arm to maintain their balance—drove dark veils before their eyes and caused their lungs to work hectically. The grandstand was about 150 meters away from the spot where the Fair Lady had touched down and it took Chellish's group 10 minutes to walk the short distance. Chellish stopped in front of the platform and looked up to the Whistler who occupied the highest seat and who presumably was the chief of the city if not the entire land. He raised both arms as a greeting, which caused him a considerable effort and made him breathe audibly. However his effort was rewarded. Iiy-Juur-Eelie understood his gesture and raised his arms as well. He looked rather ridiculous with his thin, 11/2-meter-long arms and the small palms with 6 talon-like fingers. He held his arms leaned against his cone-shaped head as if he were afraid they might break off. Next, Chellish pulled a roll of paper out of the pocket of his garment, opened it and began to read a little speech of salutation which he had written down previously. In his speech he claimed to be an envoy of the world of Aurigel which was the single planet circling the sun nearest to the Peep system. This neighbouring sun was 7 light-years away from Peep. Chellish took it for granted that the Whistlers didn't know how many planets that sun had—nor did he know any better. Besides this was of no importance at this moment. None of the Whistlers understood a word of his address. However Chellish noticed that several uniformed men who stood at the sidewalls of the platform took out small gadgets whose purpose it apparently was to record his words of greeting. They would probably use the recording to reconstruct the language of the alien guests with the aid of the electronic transmitters which the Whistlers had used already on Grautier in order to establish the first communication. After Chellish had finished, Iiy-Juur-Eelie answered him in a squeaky voice. He said a few sentences, then rose and walked down the steps in the centre of the grandstand with measured demeanour. Everybody on the grandstand got up at the same time. Iiy-Juur-Eelie approached Chellish, stretched out his arms and put his hands on his shoulders with a slight bow. Since His Excellency was at least 2.60 meters tall it looked quite odd. Chellish was unable to put his own hands on the ruler's shoulders although he had always considered himself a tall man at 1.85 meters; all he could do was to take a much deeper bow. Iiy-Juur-Eelie now turned around and walked toward the left side of the grandstand, waving to Chellish to stay at his side. Chellish's companions followed behind them and the dignitaries who had been sitting on the platform joined the procession. Chellish noticed that a number of vehicles were lined up not far from the grandstand. Evidently they were air-cushioned cars, as he saw no wheels. When Iiy-Juur-Eelie reached the first vehicle it lifted itself about 20 centimetres off the ground, blowing a hissing cloud of dust on both sides of its oval body. The President-King and Chellish entered the first vehicle and Chellish's friends were escorted to the other vehicles by the Whistler officers and officials. At a signal which seemed to come from a trumpet or a similar instrument, the column started to move and drove toward the city. Chellish didn't consider it impolite to look out the window in order to get an initial view of the city. He couldn't speak the language of the Whistlers and Iiy-Juur-Eelie had no other means of conversing with his new guest. From time to time he spread his wide, thin-lipped mouth even farther in order to indicate a friendly smile. Chellish very soon saw why the Whistlers

used air-cushioned transports. There were no streets in the city in the sense the Terrans used the term. What ran there at the bottom of the gorge between the stalagmite-towers was fairly broad but very rough and without pavement. It looked as if the Whistlers had merely removed the grass when they built the city and called it a street without further improvement. The towers also had an improvised look as Chellish observed after he recovered from his amazement at their tremendous height. The average height was 400 meters but many soared up to 600 or 700 meters. The stalagmites had the appearance of being piled up at random. Round windows were cut into the walls at irregular intervals as if each tenant had picked his opening wherever he liked it. A number of buildings showed sections of different colours which indicated that they had been built at different stages and at far apart times. Indeed there were also some truncated towers, structures which were only 80 or 100 meters high and were closed with a wide platform instead of the usual steeples. They were probably yet to be finished. Above the streets there were bridges suspended between the towers on which many curious Whistlers had gathered to catch a glimpse of the passing column. Chellish noted that the uniformed men who accompanied the column in open cars at both sides and both ends paid special attention to these bridges. Were they afraid of an assassination? There were few pedestrians in the streets and hardly any vehicles. Presumably the route travelled by the column had been cleared of all other traffic. Chellish guessed that the city must have about 4 million inhabitants and he couldn't believe that the almost total absence of traffic in the centre of the city was a normal condition. After a drive of about one hour the column turned into a broad highway-lined on both sides by tall trees resembling poplars-which led out of the city. The highway ended after about 5 kilometres at the foot of an especially high tower. The tower formed the point of a wedge whose flanks also consisted of towers. The structures were connected by numerous bridges of all sizes and shapes which made a unified complex of the 9 towers. Chellish had no doubt that it was the residence of the man sitting beside him. A wide gateway opened at the base of the first tower through which the aircushion car floated into a brightly-lit hall. The other vehicles followed as Chellish reassured himself with a quick backward glance. Servants in splendid uniforms rushed forward from all sides and took their places at the doors of the vehicles. Their initial goal had been reached: Chellish and his companions were inside the 'palace' of the President-King of Peep, or rather Heeninniy, although they didn't know it at the moment. 3/ THE SECRET DOCUMENTS "I've got a job for you," Admiral Wee-Nii said 3 days later to his aide Fij-Gul, "and I don't know if you're going to like it." Fij-Gul listened attentively. "At the court of His Excellency," Wee-Nii continued, "they have meanwhile found out that the spaceship of the aliens is empty and was left unguarded. I want you to take a few men and have a look if there is any important information in which we would be interested." "Is there any reason to distrust the aliens?" Fij-Gul asked suspiciously. Wee-Nii waved his hand. "First of all there are always reasons to mistrust strangers and, secondly, it's none of your business nor is it mine. Orders are orders and this one comes from the Presidential Chambers. So pick a few men and take some micro-cameras along. The sooner you finish the job, the better." "But I don't have any idea how airlocks can be opened," Fij-Gul grumbled. "The strangers have locked them." "This problem has already been solved," Wee-Nii said. "Our technicians weren't asleep all this time either. Just let me know when you're ready to enter the ship and you'll find the airlock open." Fij-Gul turned around but before he left through the curtain which served as a door, he thought of another question. "What will happen if the strangers surprise me in the act?" Wee-Nii made a vague gesture. "Then the court will hold you in disgrace as long as the aliens remain on Heeninniy," he answered. "Of course the Presidential Chambers will deny all knowledge. If you get caught you'll have to assume all responsibility yourself. You'll have to make this clear to your men too." Fij-Gul saluted and left. He walked along the high and long corridor outside, which was uneven and packed down by footsteps. He mulled

over the assignment he had drawn and felt that it was utterly distasteful to him. "No," Sheldrake assured with emphasis, "I've never had a more interesting job in my life and time has never seemed so short as aboard the Fair Lady." A buzzing, disturbing noise suddenly filled the little room. Sheldrake looked up and glanced with dismay at the little warning box which hung on the wall behind him. "Visitors!" he said tersely. "Take your places, boys." Loewy and Krahl got up and left the room. Sheldrake followed and locked the hatch to the small room. The hatch was designed to look exactly like the adjacent wall. It fitted in without showing a crack and only by measuring the adjoining rooms would anyone else have been able to detect that there was a 3rd room between the other 2. Loewy and Krahl slipped down the dark corridor toward the right and Sheldrake turned left. He tried to analyse his emotions and concluded that he didn't feel any fear. He was excited but not afraid. To discover this seemed to calm him somehow. He touched his weapon, which he carried in his hip pocket, and turned into a narrow corridor leading to the radio room. He checked the observation screen, which gave him a view of the Command Centre, and found that it was properly switched on as it flickered once in awhile. The screen was dark since it was also dark in the Command Centre at the present time. Sheldrake closed his eyes and listened. He didn't know who had opened the airlock. But Chellish himself had installed the warning instrument and advised the entire crew of it. Therefore it was extremely unbelievable that one of their own men had done it. Whistlers, Sheldrake thought. They must have become curious, wanting to snoop around. Although he strained his ears, he was unable to hear anything. Whoever the intruder was, he moved quietly and cautiously as one would expect a burglar to do. Sheldrake opened his eyes again and looked at the picture screen. He waited for the light in the Command Centre to go on but he knew that he would be startled when it happened. Wee-Nii had kept his promise: the airlock of the alien ship was open. Still, Fij-Gul felt not a bit more comfortable than before. What if the strangers had failed to tell the truth and left guards aboard the vessel in order to protect it against any unauthorized trespassing? Then he, Fij-Gul, would have to take the blame for the mess. There would be nobody to back him up. Even Wee-Nii would feign astonishment and pretend that he didn't have the faintest notion how his adjutant got the crazy idea to sneak into the ship of the strangers with a handful of men and violate the laws of hospitality in such a flagrant manner. He would be demoted and sent to the farthest and most boring corner of Heeninniy. If they would ever call him back and restore his honour after the strangers had departed, as Wee-Nii had promised, was something that could not be predicted with certainty. Iiy-Juur-Eelie's verdicts were sometimes inscrutable. With a whistling sound of disgust he pulled himself up through the airlock. The lamp in his hand lit up and the beam searched along the wall. Fij-Gul had learned before he started out with his 5 men how to operate the hatches of the unfamiliar ship. He quickly located the button which opened and closed the inner hatch doors. He waited till his men had caught up with him and then shut the outer hatch. At the moment it closed with a sucking noise, the airlock chamber was flooded with light. Fij-Gul was stunned at first since nobody had told him that the illumination worked automatically. They probably didn't know it either. Fij-Gul waited awhile and listened. Only after a few minutes had passed without a stir did he feel sure that no danger threatened. He opened the inner hatch and was no longer surprised that the corridor behind it was also bathed in light. In the centre of the corridor was a conveyor belt which was not running. Fij-Gul motioned his men and they cautiously went ahead through the corridor. In time he became bolder. At first he stopped and listened at each corridor crossing. Since everything was perfectly quiet, he became more confident as he went along. It began to look as if the aliens had told the truth: the ship was empty. Fij-Gul thought it most likely that the desired information-if there was any to be found at all-could be dug up in the Command Centre from where the ship was steered. Following his sense of symmetry, he guessed that the Command Centre was

located at the centre of the ship and he was not mistaken in this case. After searching for half an hour during which time his head-and those of his men even more-began to drone under the unaccustomed high air pressure inside the ship, they reached a circular room which was much too low for his standards. The room had so many switch panels, consoles, observation screens, dials, loudspeakers and other instruments on its walls that its function was unmistakable. Fij-Gul had only the vaguest idea what to look for. He saw several cabinets, which were filled with files. The files contained papers with the peculiar letters of the strangers. Fij-Gul didn't know the writing and had therefore no possibility of recognizing what was or wasn't important. Thus he thought it best to photograph everything he could lay his hands on. While he was busy taking pictures his men examined the other cabinets which were all empty with one exception. Fij-Gul felt relief. The sooner he could leave the ship the better it would be. He had the files spread out on one of the tables and photographed each sheet with a small camera which he had slipped over a finger through a metallic ring. Shel Drake indeed flinched a little when the light went on. He saw the 6 Whistlers enter the Command Centre and hoped that they would fail to detect the little electronic eye above the entrance door which surveyed the entire room. He could also hear one of the Whistlers, who was a little taller than the others, utter some squeaky noises while pointing in various directions. He knew that a recording instrument monitored the conversation and that they would later be able to translate it into English by using the transmitter they had obtained from the Whistlers on Grautier. He regretted that he didn't have such a set because he was extremely anxious to learn what the Whistlers were after in particular. He watched the tallest of the men, apparently the leader of the group, take file after file out of the cabinet, spread them out on the table and photograph them with a miniature camera. He knew that these files had been purposely put into the cabinet by Chellish in order to mislead the Whistlers and he was pleased to see that they swallowed the bait. If the Whistlers succeeded in translating the documents they would be taught to exercise extreme caution in their treatment of the envoys of Aurigel. About 40 minutes later all papers had been photographed. The officer-if he was one-took a last look around and Shel Drake had the impression that he was glad not to discover any more documents. With a quick, nervous gesture he motioned his men to leave and closed the hatch behind himself. The observation screen turned dark as the light in the Command Centre was switched off. After 5 minutes the intercom buzzed. Shel Drake answered and heard Krahl's Voice: "All clear, Fred! They're outside again." Shel Drake nodded happily. "Come back!" he said. Soon they were back in the little room. Loewy looked at his watch and asked: "How about sending them a radio message?" "Be patient," Shel Drake counselled. "Not so fast, or they might guess that it has something to do with their break-in." Krahl answered with a disappointed expression: "I'm not so sure about that. Maybe the Whistlers don't know the first thing about codes. Our message wouldn't make any sense to them." Shel Drake dismissed it with a gesture of his hand. "You're indulging in a fantasy, Walter. A highly civilized race that knows nothing about codes? That is like saying that they haven't learned how to build automobiles in the United States. Besides, leave it to Chellish; he knows how to handle it!" The Secret Service of His Excellency the President-King worked at top speed. The documents which had been secured by a certain officer of the Airfleet comprised a total of 223 sheets of uniform size and the notes had to be deciphered and interpreted. His Excellency had personally given orders to complete the translation of the material before the next morning. No protest was permissible against the order since it came from the highest source although the Director of the Secret Service was of the opinion that he had never before received such a foolish demand. Their knowledge of the script used by the aliens was far from complete. It was based on a totally different principle than the writing of the people of Heeninniy. Each sound had a special character whereas the writing of the Whistlers represented a highly developed

form of hieroglyphics which usually had only one sign for an entire word. Gii-Yeep, the Director of the Secret Service, cancelled all leaves which he had given the day before and made it clear to his employees that they would lose their jobs unless they literally complied with the order of His Excellency. Gii-Yeep himself buckled down and worked all night. They finally accomplished the impossible. The task was completed shortly after sunrise. The stenographic transcript covered 70 sheets of the same size as the original text. What Gii-Yeep held in his hands when he left his subterranean office to go up to the residential tower of His Excellency amounted to an extensive description of the world of Aurigel from which the aliens had come. It dealt with their political relations to other inhabited stars that seemed to exist to Gii-Yeep's amazement in great numbers in the near and far surrounding space, with their expansionary plans and their technology and military powers. After thoroughly studying the detailed account a person would be as well informed as if the President of Aurigel himself had told him all his secrets in hour-long talks. Gii-Yeep was overwhelmed by the mass of information and looked forward to the highest praise for his accomplishment. However it was much less pleasant to read the report concerning the military might of the planet Aurigel. Gii-Yeep was no politician but if he had been one, he would have to admit that Heeninniy could not afford for the next 500 years to adopt an attitude other than friendly and servile toward the race of Aurigel. His Excellency was already waiting for Gii-Yeep. "Finished?" Iiy-Juur-Eelie asked tersely. "Yes, Your Excellency," Gii-Yeep answered humbly. "Good work. What do the papers contain? Read them to me!" Gii-Yeep obeyed. As he read, Iiy-Juur-Eelie sat in a comfortable chair, stretching out his endless legs. Gii-Yeep noticed however that he was far less calm than he pretended. His eyes fluttered and his claw-like fingers were in constant motion. "What do you think of it?" Iiy-Juur-Eelie asked tensely after Gii-Yeep had finished reading. "First of all, Your Excellency, the aliens are obviously far superior to us," Gii-Yeep replied. "In technological respect, yes," His Excellency agreed. "But they apparently have so far no aggressive plans against Heeninniy." "Nothing of the sort was mentioned in the report," Gii-Yeep admitted. "It would be fair to assume that they have no hostile intentions." "Good. So that will give us some time." Gii-Yeep was surprised. Time? Time for what? "If we could find out for instance," Iiy-Juur-Eelie reflected, "how their ship is equipped, if we could learn on what principle their propulsion engine and their weapons function, wouldn't that help us to improve our methods, Gii-Yeep?" Gii-Yeep hastened to agree. "It certainly would, Your Excellency." "Our technicians are clever people, Gii-Yeep," Iiy-Juur-Eelie continued. "If they were given a few days or a few weeks time they could easily ascertain what we need to know. Nothing is simpler than closing a technological gap if one has a model to work with." He got up-quicker and with more spring than his age would seem to allow. "Of course the aliens won't let us willingly pry around their ship," he said, lowering his voice. "We must... oh, I've got it, Gii-Yeep! How long would it take the passengers of an airplane which crashes in the middle of the Eenee Desert with its radio demolished to get back to civilization?" Gii-Yeep's eyes widened. "At least 10 days," he uttered with a whistle. "If they manage to survive, that is." "Oh we'll certainly see to that. We won't have anything serious happen to the envoys of another world. But they can't hold us responsible for the crash of an airplane. After all, our technology has not yet reached such a state of perfection as theirs. Right?" Gii-Yeep pondered the plan and the more he thought about it the more childish it appeared to him. He had brooded a whole night over the story of the aliens and he couldn't believe that it would be that simple to outwit them. What if they got wind of the plot and called their armed fleet to Heeninniy? Gii-Yeep dared to express his doubts although this was sometimes dangerous. However Iiy-Juur-Eelie was in an excellent mood and didn't resent it. On the other hand he didn't take his objections seriously either. Gii-Yeep was dismissed with a compliment for his fast work. However he was given a hint that he would soon receive further

instructions about the scheme which had already been outlined by His Excellency. This spoiled some of his good mood. The rest was dampened when he returned to his office and learned from the monitoring officer that a radio message had been intercepted half an hour ago which apparently originated from the ship of the strangers. The message had been transmitted with enormous power and it consisted merely of a few signals. Gii-Yeep's technicians had succeeded in deciphering its meaning. It said: EXPECT EASY HARVEST. Gii-Yeep believed he knew what harvest was meant. He was also vexed by the fact that a radio call had been sent from the ship although the strangers were all in the palace. He called the Presidential Chamberlain and learned that the strangers had full freedom of movement and that several of them constantly roamed around without escorts. This eased his concern. As Director of the Secret Service he had been informed of Fij-Gul's nocturnal adventure and he would have regretted if the young officer had fallen victim to some trick of the aliens-such as leaving a secret board-watch in the ship. Finally it occurred to him to inquire whether they had determined the direction in which the call had been beamed. The result was significant in Gii-Yeep's opinion. The message had been aimed where Feejnee, Heeninniy's gigantic uninhabited neighbour planet with its 8 moons, was at this time when the distance between the 2 stars measured 900 million kilometres. 4/ SECRET MESSAGE "It must have worked," O'Bannon said. "I was near the ship when Sheldrake transmitted the call. They'll think I did it." Chellish was pleased. "They probably have already figured it out. The code is very simple and I hope it wasn't too hard for them to guess what the easy harvest implied." Mullon shook his head. "I don't believe they'd have to rack their brains over it very long. As far as I can tell, their mentality is not that much different from ours. They seem to think along the same general lines. We only have to imagine what we would do in a certain situation to know in most cases how the Whistlers would react under the same circumstances." "In that case, let's try it right away," Milligan chimed in. "What are the Whistlers going to do now that they get hold of our papers on Aurigel and intercepted our radio message?" Mullon thought awhile before he answered. "Now they know that our technology is 5 centuries ahead of theirs. They're a proud and martial race whose situation is becoming desperate because their world is too small for their 3 billion people. I'm inclined to draw the conclusion that they'll be anxious to wrest the secrets of our technology from us." "How?" Chellish wanted to know. "By investigating our ship, for instance." "They wouldn't dare," O'Bannon claimed. "Of course they'd have to think of a subterfuge," Mullon continued, unimpressed. "Anything to keep us away from the ship for a few days." Chellish got up. "You're absolutely right, Mullon. That's just what they'll do. They'll proceed gingerly because they can't simply kill us. They would be haunted by the fear that our armada would attack them in revenge. But they can stage an accident and make it look so genuine that nobody could blame them for it." "And what do you propose we can do about it?" O'Bannon asked with curiosity. Chellish shrugged his shoulders. "That'll all depend on the situation. We'll cross that bridge when we come to it. Milligan, did you write out the text?" "It's been ready for some time." "What does it say?" Milligan puckered up his mouth and produced some high tones like a flutist: "Eejnii-hee-Iii-weeu..." "Don't be silly! In Eng... I mean French." "Caution! The foreigners went to subjugate Heeninniy. "Is the language correct? Nobody must be allowed to suspect that we've written these words ourselves." "Listen," Milligan protested, insulted. "For 6 days I've done my best to learn the language of the Whistlers and you think I don't know how to write a simple sentence like this?" "I meant no offence, Milligan," Chellish soothed him. "You can't learn too much about a totally different language in 6 days. What makes you so sure it's right?" "Because I've copied the text," Milligan replied. "Copied? Where?" "They've got posters in the city which proclaim: CAUTION! THE INSURGENTS WANT TO ENSLAVE HEENINNIY! All I had to do was to replace the words 'insurgents' and 'enslave' by 'foreigners' and 'subjugate'. This wasn't very difficult." Chellish showed the greatest interest. "What are these posters

all about?" "I intended to talk to you about them," Milligan replied. "It seems that a strong opposition against the ruling system exists on Peep. The insurgents call themselves guerrillas and aspire to set up a democratic regime. At least that's how my escort explained it. Of course this opposition is illegal like everything else in this beautiful world and it causes Iiy-Juur-Eelie quite a bit of trouble. That's why he's waging a propaganda war." Chellish nodded. "They could turn out to be very helpful," he commented quietly, talking more to himself than to the others. Then he looked up. "OK. Let's get the posters done! We don't have any time to lose." ... Iiy-Juur-Eelie didn't consider it prudent to control the movements of the foreigners although he would have liked to do so. He had given them several large apartments at different levels in one of his palace towers and assigned the appropriate number of servants to his noble guests. Furthermore he had put his fleet of cars at the disposal of the strangers. The chauffeurs had been ordered to instruct the guests in driving the vehicles themselves or to take them wherever they wished to go. The whole affair was treated like a state visit. Iiy-Juur-Eelie ate official dinners with his guests and displayed a great deal of pomp and hospitality on such occasions. The dinners were followed by friendly conversations during which each party tried to probe the others' true feelings. The guests expressed their wishes and Iiy-Juur-Eelie advised them on the best way to fulfil them. Otherwise the strangers could do as they pleased and they took good advantage of it-much to Iiy-Juur-Eelie's regret. Not that he was afraid of espionage or something similar. According to the report Gii-Yeep had presented to him, the aliens had no such intentions. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was eager to persuade his guests to take a tour of the whole planet so that they would become stranded in the Eenee Desert and give his technicians time to study their vessel. However as long as the visitors were content to remain in the capital and rove through the dark streets for hours without escorts, he had hardly an opportunity to make such a proposal. He would have preferred it if he could have simply ordered them to take a roundtrip flight. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was also perplexed by the radio-message they had intercepted. Did it really mean that a hostile fleet was stationed somewhere on Feejnee or one of its moons, ready to pounce on Heeninniy? Iiy-Juur-Eelie faced a dilemma. In keeping with his character, he considered the aliens as enemies. So far he had believed he had the upper hand, because their attitude was friendly and they behaved quite innocently. However if they had come to Heeninniy on a mission of reconnaissance before launching an invasion by their fleet, his advantage was more than dubious. Therefore he followed each movement of the strangers with apprehension. He had intended to place listening bugs in the apartments of the strangers but refrained from the idea because he was afraid that their technical knowledge was so much more sophisticated that they would have immediately detected these devices and regarded it as a hostile act. Thus he was forced to rely on the reports of Gii-Yeep's Secret Service agents who tailed the visitors continuously. However the information they provided was insignificant since the strangers spent all their days driving around the city to learn the ways of life on Heeninniy on the spot-or so they pretended. So it went again today. A security agent followed the strangers into the city and watched them looking at one of the main shopping streets and finally enter a Uuhee bar from which they had not yet emerged 4 hours later. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was amused by the thought that the Uuhee could have made them feel tipsy. However he underestimated the capacity of his guests, as Uuhee was only some kind of beer and a rather light one at that. Chellish and his 9 friends had spent an hour to marvel at the peculiar shopping streets. The stores of the Whistlers were not located on street level-along the coasting track as O'Bannon called it-but high up in the towers, and the higher they were the more elegant and expensive they would be. Huge bridges between the high commercial towers formed regular business streets and were lined with the smaller boutiques. Buying and selling was carried on in a manner resembling the customs of oriental bazaars. Almost everywhere-except on the highest

floors-the merchandise was hawked with violent screeching and no customer made a deal unless he had bargained and cussed for at least 15 minutes. Chellish and his partners had been given small electronic transmitters which translated the unknown language into French so that they could follow some of the conversations-if that was the term for them. They enjoyed the bartering and acquired some souvenirs with the money they had been generously presented. What astonished them most of all was that the Whistlers paid little attention to the foreigners. This suited Chellish very well as he could wander around without being molested by gawkers. He had no desire to satisfy anyone's curiosity. On their stroll through the shopping district Milligan had the job of watching for detectives and it didn't take long before he whispered to Chellish: "I've noticed 2 faces behind us for some time. The men move at the same pace with us and stop when we do while they seem to eye us suspiciously." Chellish asked for a description of the 2 men but was unable to pick them out of the crowd of Whistlers because all the cone-shaped heads with the pinched faces looked alike to him. Therefore he left it to Milligan to keep an eye on the agents. At the end of the street, which was crammed with shops, they found a number of places in a spacious tower which offered refreshments and snacks. Chellish and his companions entered a bar which was almost full. They found an empty table and sat down on the tall uncomfortable chairs. Milligan, who was the only one among the 10 who could read some of the Whistler's signs, had noted the word Uuhee above the entrance to the bar which apparently advertised an unfamiliar drink. The Whistlers in the bar were already more or less inebriated. The place was even louder than the streets and Milligan suggested they should taste the Uuhee. The Terrans found the service rather odd. Everybody shouted his order in the direction of some kind of a bar behind which 2 Whistlers stood and repeated the order to show that they understood it. They then shouted again after they had either mixed or poured the drink. The customer then got up and went to the bar to pick up and pay for his drink. As it frequently happened that several people had asked for the same drinks, the patrons started to quarrel at the bar since the mysterious Uuhee made their behaviour rowdy instead of peaceful. Milligan puckered up his lips and tried to call "10 Uuhees" as clearly as possible with the proper pronunciation. He beamed with delight when one of the 2 men behind the bar took his call and repeated it loudly. The Uuhee was poured into non-transparent cups and put on the bar as the bartender shouted again: "10 Uuhees!" Milligan, O'Bannon and Wolley rose to pick up the cups. Each one held about half a litre. They tasted the beverage with great expectations. O'Bannon took a big swig. His eyes popped and his face became twisted. He gulped and announced with fervent disgust: "Near beer! 3rd class!" None of the others voiced a better opinion. After the first sip it seemed to be inexplicable why the Whistlers were so besotted until Chellish offered his theory: "Maybe it's because of the low air pressure. Perhaps alcohol has a stronger effect when it is taken in thin air." He looked around and noticed a Whistler sitting 2 tables away and staring at them. In contrast to the others he was very calm which made an exceedingly distinct impression. Chellish looked at him and after awhile the Whistler turned his eyes the other way. The conversation around the table of the Terrans was mostly chitchat. When Chellish glanced a 2nd time at the other table he found that the quiet Whistler still looked at them. At the next opportunity he nudged Milligan and asked him unobtrusively: "Take a look at the 2nd table in the direction of the door and tell me if that man is one of those who followed us." Milligan looked carefully around. "The quiet one?" he inquired. "Yes, that's the one I mean." "No, he's not one of the spies I've seen before. Maybe he's a new one." This didn't seem plausible to Chellish because, as far as he remembered, the man had already been sitting there when they came in from the street. But what could he be if he wasn't an informer? Finally Chellish peered a 3rd time at the stranger. This time he didn't evade his look but slowly lowered his hairless lids over his eyes, raised them again and repeated the inconspicuous gesture 3 times. It wasn't much different from the wink of a

Terran to attract attention or point out something without letting anyone else know about it. Chellish imitated the gesture and as far as he could read the facial expressions of the Whistlers the stranger seemed to understand him. Chellish turned his attention again to his cup and took a sip of Uuhee. He had no idea what the Whistler might expect him to do. Was he supposed to get up and go some place where they could talk undisturbed or did he want to be called to their table? He didn't mention his observation to anyone. It would be impossible to tell 9 people such startling news without making them turn their heads at once and stare at the man in question. He had to avoid any undue commotion at all costs. After a few minutes the Whistler got up. Chellish observed him closely and saw that he opened the fingers of his right hand for a fraction of a second to show him a small piece of paper. After closing his hand he began to walk toward Chellish's table. Shortly before reaching it he turned left into a wide aisle separating 2 rows of tables in the bar. In doing so he stumbled over a chair leg which was in his way. He tottered and Chellish jumped up to keep him from falling down. The Whistler held on to his garment, regained his balance and bowed politely. He uttered a few high-pitched sounds which the transmitter in Chellish's pocket translated at once: "I thank You very much!" Then, as if nothing had happened, the Whistler continued on his way, walking down the aisle to the back of the room and disappearing through a door. Chellish knew that he had the little piece of paper the stranger had shown him in his pocket. That's why the Whistler had grabbed him just above his pocket. Had the incident been noticed? It didn't look like it. The din of the intoxicated and cantankerous Whistlers persisted and nobody paid any special attention to the table of the aliens. Still! Chellish left the note for the time being where it was. Two hours later after they left the bar to take an elevator down to the street level to get their cars, he fished it out to give it to Milligan for deciphering. He was quite surprised when he saw that the text didn't need any deciphering. The text was written in the script Chellish and his colleagues had invented on Grautier and which they used on their journey to Peep. The note read: PLEASE MEET SUNDOWN TODAY AIRPORT SOUTH GATE. The French was atrocious but it was clearly understandable. Chellish had been requested to meet somebody-probably the same Whistler-at sundown at the southern exit of the airport. Chellish could not even try to guess what the purpose was. He put the slip of paper back in his pocket when the elevator stopped. The cars were parked at the ground level in a brightly lit hall where the Whistlers left their vehicles while doing their shopping. There were 15 elevators for the convenience of the shoppers. At the moment there were very few people using the elevators. Several Whistlers left an elevator cabin at the same time with them and went to their aircushion cars, chattering in their squeaky tongue. "Milligan!" Chellish said in a low tone. "Take a poster and go back up and put it on the wall of the cabin. Be sure that nobody sees you when you leave." Milligan was all prepared. He went back to the elevator and waited until the door was closed. Then he took out one of the posters and pressed it against the metal sidewall as the elevator ascended. This was simple and quick because the back of the poster was self-adhesive. He stopped at a floor which was completely deserted and changed elevators to go down again. A few moments later he joined Chellish and his friends in the garage just as they were about to get into their cars. "Did you do it?" Chellish asked quietly. "Of course," Milligan replied. "The first one has been put up and nobody knows how it got there." "We hope," Chellish added. 5/ MIDNIGHT MYSTERIES During the afternoon they distributed 9 more posters which exhausted their first batch. They managed to be so careful that nobody had seen them. It would vex Iiy-Juur-Eelie who violated the hospitality in such a flagrant manner and above all it would baffle him why anybody would want to do such a thing. Chellish was well pleased with the day's work. He considered it a success and was of the opinion that it would create a lot of confusion and contribute to making the Whistlers forget all about Grautier or at least diminish the importance they attached to that planet for some time to come.

His mission to Peep didn't attempt to do more than that. However his day had not yet ended. He was still to meet the unknown Whistler at the south gate of the airport. Perhaps there was another opportunity to apply a lever to get things rolling faster. Chellish had decided to keep the little episode under his hat for the present time. If the unknown Whistler was a member of the insurgents, it could turn out to be a serious and important matter and any risk, however slight, had to be avoided. About one hour before sundown the little column of cars returned to the palace of His Excellency, the President-King. Chellish and his pals went to their rooms and Milligan was instructed to tell Iiy-Juur-Eelie when he invited them for dinner that Chellish would be unable to accept as he had some business to take care of aboard his ship. Half an hour after returning to the palace Chellish left again. In the meantime he had taken Mullon into his confidence and Mullon insisted on accompanying him on his secret rendezvous. Chellish had no objections since the possibility that he might walk into a trap could not be excluded. "Feejnee is 900 million kilometres away," Wee-Nii begged to consider, "and it is moving away at a rate of 4 kilometres every second, Your Excellency." "I know," Iiy-Juur-Eelie replied sullenly but since he knew that it wasn't easy to fool his Commanding Admiral, he qualified his remark by adding: "At least I figured something like that. I'm afraid you'll have to think again, Admiral. It's not a question of calculating risks. One of our ships must fly to Feejnee. I didn't summon you here to ask you if it's possible but because I want to know what results we could expect." Wee-Nii leaned back in his chair and took a second to pity the men Iiy-Juur-Eelie wanted to send to Feejnee in the 2nd of his 3 ships. "We can assume that the aliens maintain frequent radio contacts," Iiy-Juur-Eelie continued, "if they use Feejnee or one of its moons as a base. I know that we can't rival their technology but, I ask you, isn't there a possibility that we can pinpoint their base and establish one of our own without them getting wind of it?" Wee-Nii hesitated a little. "To answer this I'd have to know what kind of rangefinder and detection instruments the aliens have in their possession and the magnitude, of their range." "Too bad we don't know it," His Excellency said gruffly. "Just assume the worst case and give me an estimate." Wee-Nii began to weigh the possibilities in his mind but no matter how he looked at the venture he arrived at the odds of 100,000 to 1 for the plan and advised Iiy-Juur-Eelie accordingly. This really irked his Excellency. "Don't you understand," he yelled angrily, "that our existence is in jeopardy? Even if the odds were worse, we must take a chance! Well then?" Wee-Nii tried to keep his composure and went on to explain: "We'll have to be ready to determine the exact direction of the radio beam the next time they send a message. 900 million kilometres are not too much of a distance and it should be possible to verify whether the base of the fleet is on Feejnee itself or on one of its moons and, if the latter is the case, on which one. As soon as we've obtained this information we can try to manoeuvre our ship in the shadow of Feejnee or its moon to get close to the enemy. This would be the only way. As I said before, I've already given you my judgment for the success." "Yes, 3 times already," Iiy-Juur-Eelie growled, annoyed. "Get one of the ships ready for launching; prepare the crews for their mission and take over the weapons you'll receive." "Weapons?" Wee-Nii asked in amazement. "Yes, weapons. Or did you think the men will fly to Feejnee just to say hi to the aliens?" "Are you contemplating an attack, Your Excellency?" Wee-Nii asked with a heavy voice. His Excellency narrowed his eyes. "I don't know that it's anybody's business what I want to do. The Commander of the ship will receive his instructions from me personally," he said in a hostile tone. "Is that clear?" Wee-Nii replied with a bow: "Perfectly, Your Excellency." "Good. Now something else. Did you hear from Sey-Wuun?" "No, Your Excellency." "That's strange. What could've happened to him?" Wee-Nii made an uncertain gesture. "Collision with a meteor, a raid by the primitive settlers..." "Balderdash! You call them primitive yourself and you profess to believe that they could attack one of our ships successfully?" "The

expression 'primitive settlers' has been first used by Capt. Sey-Wuun, Your Excellency. The idea has been accepted although the degree of primitivity is entirely unknown." "So what do you propose to do?" "I have to ask you for a subsidy, Your Excellency," Wee-Nii answered quickly and boldly. "The Spacefleet is no longer in a position to feed itself." "You can forget about that," Iiy-Juur-Eelie rejoined in an unexpectedly calm tone. "A pound of flour is already worth its weight in Diijeeh pieces and the price is rising all the time. The treasury of the government is empty. They have undertaken this project and will see it through. Send a 2nd ship to Weelie-Wee if the first one fails to return." Wee-Nii bowed gratefully. "I intended to ask your permission for this, Your Excellency," he said. "How much longer will the food reserves for the fleet last?" His Excellency questioned. "Only 200 days," Wee-Nii replied. "And how long will the roundtrip and loading take the ship?" "At least 180 days, Your Excellency." "Then you better get it on the way without delay. I can't stress the fact enough that the treasury has no reserves to supply the fleet. You're compelled to fend for yourself." Wee-Nii was aware that this 'irreversible' fact would change as soon as the fleet was called upon to proceed against the aliens but he kept his thoughts to himself. Iiy-Juur-Eelie nodded to let him know that the consultation was ended. Wee-Nii rose and left after bowing 3 times in the prescribed manner. . . . The sentry at the north entrance of the airport assured Chellish that no ship would land during the next hour and that it would be safe to drive across the airfield in the aircushion car to get to the Fair Lady. Chellish glided southward and felt sure that nobody at the northern gate would notice that he headed for the southern exit instead of his ship as the land was already veiled in darkness and the airfield was not illuminated. The sun had set half an hour earlier but Chellish thought it wiser to arrive at the meeting point in darkness. The mystery person would wait if his business was important enough. It took Chellish some time to locate the gate in the south as it was not situated straight across from the northern entrance. At the gate stood a high and narrow guardhouse and when Chellish stopped, a Whistler in uniform stepped out. Chellish opened his car window. "I'm a guest of His Excellency," he said curtly and waited till the language converter translated his announcement. The uniformed guard saluted and stepped back, opening the gate and letting the hissing car pass. Mullon, who was crouched on the rear seat, looked out the window. "There's not a soul in sight," he muttered. "I'm not surprised," Chellish replied. "I'd hardly think he would want to talk to us close to the guard." He turned right and drove along the border of the airfield, proceeding very slowly to give Mullon a chance to search the terrain. However, Mullon had little luck; he saw nothing. "Oh well, let's try the other side," Chellish suggested. He turned around in a wide curve to stay out of the sentry's view and steered back to the enclosure of the airfield at the other side of the guardhouse. "If we don't find him now," Chellish said, "we'll return to the palace." They had found no trace of the man by the time the guardhouse was visible again. Chellish was afraid they would look suspicious if they kept driving around any longer and he headed back to the gate. The sentry came out again and bent down to the open car window. "We lost our way," Chellish said. "We better go back to the north gate to return to the city." The sentry waited patiently until the translator had finished the answer. Then he uttered a few hissing noises which Chellish took to be his permission to proceed until he heard the translator report: "If you've come to meet somebody, perhaps I can help you." Chellish looked up in surprise and studied the Whistler who was still standing at his car and bent down to the window. He tried to identify the face of the stranger who had passed the note into his pocket that afternoon. Was it the same face? Were the 2 men the same person? These confounded Whistlers! It was so hard to tell them apart. "Oh?" he said cautiously. "I believe it's difficult for you to recognize people of my race," the sentry replied. "Please have confidence in me although you don't know me. I'm the man who slipped you the note in the bar." "It doesn't require much confidence," Chellish admitted. "If you know about the note you

must be the man who gave it to me, or one of his friends. What can I do for you?" The Whistler made a waving gesture with his hand. "Do you wish to leave your car at the gate?" "Not necessarily. Whatever you think." "Drive around to the side and turn off the air. If the patrol comes by you can do as if you had to fix something." "Sounds alright," Chellish agreed and reversed the car. He 'choked the air' by switching off the compressor and causing the car to settle in such a slanted position as to make it appear that the motor had broken down right there. Then he got out with Mullon and went back to the gate. Befitting the proud and self-confident manner of his race, the Whistler showed no embarrassment in beginning the conversation. "You probably have already heard about the insurgents or, as we call ourselves, guerrillas. We're seeking freedom for 3 billion people. We've learned that you belong to a foreign and powerful race and we would like to request you not to lend your support to the present government." Chellish listened quietly to the translation and replied: "We don't have as much insight in the prevailing conditions as you seem to believe, my friend. We've been received by Iiy-Juur-Eelie in a friendly manner and have paid no attention to the inner conflicts existing in your world. We have no intention of using our might in the interest of anybody else." The sentry seemed to feel that it was necessary to explain the background of his movement. "The form of Heeninniy's government has been determined by a constitution. The law provides that the President-King acts as head of state and that a Council of Ministers runs the administration. It's no secret to anyone that the Council of Ministers was bought by Iiy-Juur-Eelie. They make no decision unless he orders them to do so. Neither is there any more opposition in Parliament, since Iiy-Juur-Eelie has decreed a year ago in a special amendment to the constitution that all such opposition is forbidden. Our government was set up to represent the people but in reality it is nothing but a puppet of Iiy-Juur-Eelie and they use the special amendment to commit crimes against all those who are unwilling to knuckle under without a protest. We've dedicated ourselves to fighting this system and if you concede that I'm not lying to you, you'll realize that our battle is just and honourable." Chellish's mind worked feverishly. What he had heard sounded honest. He was dubious about the plan to create additional unrest on Peep by using the guerrillas but he had to consider the fate of 8000 brethren on Grautier. "What did you have in mind?" Chellish asked. "How can we help you?" The Whistler uttered a noise which sounded like a sigh. "This is difficult to say," he replied. "Not that we can't use your help but what can strangers like you do without exposing themselves to trouble?" Chellish offered a suggestion. "Is there a possibility that we continue our contact?" "Certainly. You probably have already wondered how we know your language and your way of writing. Several of us are also members of the government's Secret Service. We've been able to infiltrate the Service with extraordinary care. Whenever you take one of your trips and request an escort, we can probably arrange that one of our men will go with you." "Very good. Then we'll need a password for identification." "Yes. That's simple enough. When our man enters your car he'll say: I hope we're going to have a pleasant trip. Then you'll know who he is." Chellish smiled. "Fine. Of course we'll need a lot more information if you want us to help you. I assume that your people will be able to secure it for us." "Of course. We're extremely grateful to you that you're willing to help us and we'll do our best to make the task easier for you." Chellish deemed it time to end the conversation. He promised the Whistler he would give the matter plenty of thought in order to determine the most effective way in which he could assist the partisans. This seemed to be more than the sentry had expected from their secret understanding and he expressed his thanks effusively, which was unusual for his race. Chellish and Mullon went back to their car. They started it up and drove back across the landing field to the northern exit without being challenged. They reached the city, which looked even more dismal at night than during the day since all public life was conducted inside the towers, and the streets were dark except for some lighted signs at the street crossings.

Chellish drove slowly without saying a word. Mullon didn't seem to feel the need for conversation either until he suddenly erupted: "I don't like this matter at all, Chellish. The insurgents seem to be honest people. But are we justified in encouraging their fight against their brothers to save our 8,000 Terrans who got into their predicament through their own fault?" Chellish looked at him with astonishment. "Since when are you so unselfish?" he asked with a touch of irony. "Are you willing to pass up such a good break for us?" "I don't know what you have in mind," Mullon replied without answering his question directly. "Let's assume that your plan leads to an open revolution. This would mean a lot of bloodshed. Perhaps 100,000 Whistlers might be killed before the revolution triumphs or is suppressed. Do you think it's right to risk the death of 100,000 Whistlers in order to save 8,000 Terrans whose lives are not even threatened, although they feel that their freedom is at stake?" Chellish nodded gravely. "I've also been pondering the pro and con of this matter," he admitted. "Your scruples are a sign of decent feelings. Yet I believe that your reasoning is wrong. Grautier is an independent state. The Whistlers want to oppress us and they don't have a shred of right to do so. Grautier is defending its liberty. Since it is a weak nation it is in no position to conduct an open war and thus depends on a secret defence by its agents. Grautier can't afford to be choosy as to the conduct of its secret war and it must use every opportunity it gets." "So you say," Mullon retorted grimly. "But what am I going to do about my troubled conscience? This mission to Peep is beginning to bother me." ... After they returned to the palace Mullon and Chellish were informed that His Excellency had preferred to wait with the dinner till the 2 most prominent of his guests had come back. His Excellency would consider it an honour, they were told, if his guests would join him in the dining room at a convenient time and suggested half an hour after their return. Chellish realized that something was up. It was impolite to let O'Bannon and the others wait with hungry stomachs because he and Mullon were absent on some private business. Iiy-Juur-Eelie obviously must have some special reason to insist that all his guests come to eat with him. As it turned out, he had 2 reasons. To begin with His Excellency urged his distinguished visitors not to confine themselves to the capital in their endeavour to study life on Heeninniy. "The entire land is at your beck and call," he assured with emphasis. "One of my private machines is at your disposal whenever you wish to take an extensive trip around Heeninniy." Then he continued to boast of the magnificent sights with which his country abounded and it was unmistakable that he was anxious to induce Chellish and his friends to accept his invitation. Chellish had a hunch why he pushed the idea. He guessed that Iiy-Juur-Eelie was desperate to get a look at the equipment of the Fair Lady and, above all, to study its propulsion system. Such a long flight would fit into a scheme to keep the aliens away from the ship for a few days and he could even stage an accident to prolong their absence. Naturally Chellish was not in favour of such shenanigans. Most of all he didn't want to accept the offer before he had a chance to talk to one of the Secret Service agents of the partisans in order to find out if any preparations for an 'accident' had been made. His hesitance, or so it seemed, only increased Iiy-Juur-Eelie's determination to stick to his guns and to bring up stronger arguments. The 2nd reason why he had assembled all of them at his table was, as he explained: "Apparently your sudden and unexpected appearance has meant a great shock to my people. You must understand that our race has lived for thousands of years in its own world without knowing that other intelligent races of brothers exist in the universe. One day-just at the time when this heretofore-lonely race is about to venture out into space-an alien ship arrives at our shores. The technology of which this spaceship is a product is evidently much superior to our own. The strangers who came in the ship exhibit the manner of travellers who are accustomed to roam every day through space on journeys of many light-years whereas a flight of a few million kilometres is a great adventure for our forlorn race. "Imagine for a moment how such an isolated people must react to

this visit. Our hopes and dreams are disappointed. Psychologists will point out that it is only natural and almost inescapable that our lonesome race will, as a result, build up a resentment against the foreigners." He looked around with his big bulging eyes as if he wanted to read in the faces of his guests what effect his speech had on them. "Do you mean to tell us that such a resentment has developed against us?" Chellish inquired. Iiy-Juur-Eelie made an emphatic affirmative gesture. "Yes. It grieves me greatly to report to you that a rumour has sprung up among my people that you came to Heeninniy to scout our country as the first step of your preparation to conquer us with your fleet." "Not one word of this is true as you well know," Chellish quickly asserted. Iiy-Juur-Eelie hastened to assure him that he had no part in these groundless accusations and considered them as a despicable affront to his hospitality. "These fabrications have probably been concocted and spread by the illegal opposition," he believed. "But whoever is responsible for it, you could contribute your share for the improvement of the domestic politics of our nation by accepting my suggestion and staying away from the capital for a few days." Now he had come out with it! Chellish had wondered why Iiy-Juur-Eelie had admitted so frankly that the population of the city was hostile toward the strangers. Undoubtedly it would have been more diplomatic to hide the mood. It was bound to alarm the strangers who had no way of knowing that such resentment existed. It was clear that Iiy-Juur-Eelie used the information about the unrest among his subjects to make the trip around the planet more palatable to his guests. "Under the given circumstances maybe it would be best to follow your invitation," Chellish agreed. "We'll think about the excursion and let you know in the morning. Meanwhile we wish to thank you for your kind offer. May I ask a last question?" "Of course, my friend!" "What made you think that your people harbour such hostile feelings toward us?" "We've found handwritten posters at several places in the city which incited the population. They read: CAUTION! THE FOREIGNERS WANT TO SUBJUGATE HEENINNIY!" During the same night Sheldrake and Krahl left the Fair Lady to give the Whistlers one more reason to worry about the aliens. They sneaked out of the ship without being seen and began to tear up the ground about 1 kilometre away from the ship. They figured that the spot was approximately at the centre of the landing field. The hole they dug was no more than half a meter deep. They put in a plastic box which was about the size of a medium big suitcase. Then they covered it up with soil again and trampled down the dirt to hide all clues. And something else occurred the same night. Fij-Gul, Wee-Nii's adjutant, who had paid a clandestine visit to the Fair Lady the night before, was plagued since that time by an uncertain and disturbing suspicion. Somehow he felt that there was something wrong with the strangers or their contentions. But what? After Fij-Gul had mulled over his doubts long enough, he rose in the middle of the night and went to the record office of the Airfleet which was located in one of the towers at the southern rim of the city. There he found the meagre notes which the captain had recorded after his first flight to Weelie-Wee. The translator of the language spoken by the primitive settlers on Weelie-Wee had been retained as part of the record. The archives also contained a 2nd translator which reproduced the language of the strangers who now were visiting Heeninniy in the spherical spaceship moored on the landing field. Fij-Gul, who was entitled to free access to the archives and all its records at any time by virtue of his rank as General Staff Officer took both translators, paper and pen, and put them on a desk to begin his comparative language studies. At first he spoke simple sentences into the transmitters and tried to absorb the sound of the foreign languages. He determined that there was no phonetic similarity between them. However this left him extremely dissatisfied as he had come to the record office with the expectation of unearthing some sensational discovery. He then proceeded to speak single words into the gadgets in the firm conviction that a resemblance-if it existed at all-could be better established through single words than whole sentences. But this method didn't seem to result in success either until he used the equivalent word for

'people' in both instruments and obtained the French pronunciation for 'peuple' which was distinctly related to the English pronunciation. The similarity was unmistakable and Fij-Gul suddenly realized what he had done wrong. He shouldn't have anticipated hearing the same sound pattern but should have compared the basic structure of the words, their consonants. The word 'people' was made up of the same consonants p and pl but the vowels between them sounded different. Encouraged by his first success, Fij-Gul quickly tried the word 'population' which also seemed to confirm his theory. Although the words sounded quite differently in the 2 languages their construction was obviously identical. Fij-Gul continued his probe with excitement through the rest of the night and he found about 20 more words which had the same roots and sounded more or less alike. He was very elated and wanted to drive immediately to the residence of Admiral Wee-Nii, wake him up and report his discovery to him. On second thought he refrained from giving in to his impetuosity. He was afraid of Wee-Nii's response when he realized that his revelation was not conclusive enough to suspect the foreigners. He had discovered 20 words which had the same meaning in both languages and the same order of consonants. Was it really enough to prove that the 2 languages were related to each other? And if the philological scientist actually confirmed their relationship, what would that accomplish? Nothing! The primitive settlers could have come from Aurigel to Weelie-Wee many centuries ago. They might have been either shipwrecked or simply put down there and it didn't necessarily follow that they maintained a connection with Aurigel. In fact it was conceivable that the settlers and the aliens knew nothing about each other. No, there was as yet no pressing reason to rouse Wee-Nii from his bed at the crack of dawn. Feeling a sense of letdown, Fij-Gul returned to his quarters and tried to make up for the sleep he had missed. 6/ TO THE TOWER! The first thing Chellish and his friends wanted to do the next morning was to take a ride to the city and he requested an escort. As usual 2 men occupied a vehicle so that they formed a column of 5 aircushion cars. The requested escorts joined them in the parking area of the residential tower. The Whistler who entered Chellish's and Mullon's car said: "I hope we're going to have a pleasant trip," just as Chellish had hoped. He gave the Whistler a friendly nod and asked him to take the seat next to him. Mullon sat as usual in the back seat. The automobiles quickly left the tower one after another by the wide gateway and drove along a road lined with poplars toward the city. "What's the latest of importance?" Chellish asked the Whistler. "Two spaceships are being prepared for takeoff," the man replied without hesitation. "They're the last two units of the fleet since Sey-Wuun must be considered as lost." "Destination?" "Weelie-Wee and Feejnee," the Whistler answered. "One is sent to Weelie-Wee to bring back wheat and the other one to Feejnee to check up if your fleet has occupied a base on that planet." Chellish was taken aback. He quickly figured out that a Whistler ship would need about 80 Peep-days under the present circumstances to reach Weelie-Wee, alias Grautier. The Fair Lady covered the same distance in a few hours. If they left Heeninniy 75 days after the start of the Whistler ship, they would still come in time to prevent its landing on Grautier and any harm the colonial city of Greenwich might befall. 75 days! This sounded very good. But he doubted nevertheless that the time would be enough to instil such formidable long-lasting fear and awe of the legendary world of Aurigel in the Whistlers that Grautier could stop worrying about future aggressions. "Of course our fleet has a base on Feejnee," Chellish stated as casually as possible in order to hide his concern. "And if I were Iiy-Juur-Eelie I wouldn't send any warships over there. Our forces exercise the greatest vigilance when it comes to safety." "I believe that his Excellency has already been warned about this," the Whistler admitted. "However he doesn't tolerate any questioning of his orders. His subordinates have no choice except to risk the flight although they've no hope of every returning. They'll either be shot down by your side or the expedition will fail because our ships are not designed to undertake such far trips and have never been tested for

it." Chellish concluded from this information that the Whistlers would have no warship left that was able to travel in space if he succeeded in torpedoing the vessel on its way to Grautier. "Anything else?" he inquired. "Yes. I've heard that you've decided to go on a flight around Heeninniy. The plane which you'll use has been fixed so that it'll go down in the Eenee Desert. Your lives will be spared but you'll be forced to cross the desert on foot. It'll take you at least 10 days to get back to a civilized region. The radio transceiver of the plane has been rigged so that it'll be demolished when you have to make an emergency landing." Chellish nodded. It was just about what he had expected. "Did they already choose a route for the flight?" "No. This will be left up to you. However the pilot has instructions to fly over the Eenee Desert at the first opportunity he gets." Chellish asked his escort for a description of the Eenee Desert and its location and he got a picture which resembled the topographic features of the Gobi Desert on Earth. Finally they discussed the rough outline of Chellish's plans which he had developed to aid the partisans. "The most important problem," he declared, "will be to prevent the armed forces from taking the side of Iiy-Juur-Eelie if it comes to an open revolution. This requires subversive work and it'll take money, plenty of it. How are you fixed for money?" "We're poor," the agent answered quickly. "The lack of funds has always been our biggest trouble. Iiy-Juur-Eelie knows what he's doing. He has won the friendship of the rich and the nobility by granting them privileges. There's hardly a wealthy man among our supporters." "That's what I thought. We'll have to do something about that. We're willing to give you a part of the money Iiy-Juur-Eelie has put at our disposal but it won't amount to more than about 20,000 Diijeeh." The eyes of the Whistler widened when he heard the sum. It was probably more than the partisans had ever seen in one lump. "Of course this won't be enough," Chellish continued the conversation. "I believe we've got a few things aboard our ship which you should be able to sell and convert into cash. Instruments and chemicals which probably are new to Heeninniy. I'd roughly estimate that you should be able to get about 500,000 Diijeeh for the stuff, perhaps even more. This should be enough to get you started. It would be best to invest the money some place where it will earn you interest." The Whistler was dumbfounded and Chellish pursued his ideas further. "It would be helpful if you could take advantage of the accident on our flight to launch a propaganda campaign against Iiy-Juur-Eelie. Perhaps you can spread the news that the posters-which you probably have already seen-were put up by the hirelings of Iiy-Juur-Eelie in order to foment a belligerent mood among the people. You can reveal his hostile intentions against the people of Aurigel. Try to arouse a big clamour against his provocation when he caused our plane to crash." The Whistler was deeply impressed. Chellish had a feeling that the insurgents, though imbued by the best intentions, were dilettantes who didn't know the art of preparing a revolution. Meanwhile the aircushion car had come to the inner city. Chellish had to pay more attention to his driving and the conversation expired. There seemed to be an accident at a street intersection. A number of vehicles were caught in a traffic jam and when Chellish tried to go around them a big van drove up from the side and wedged him in so that he was unable to move forward or backward. His escort rolled down the window and looked outside. A few uniformed men stood around a wrecked vehicle and discussed the accident. Crowds of pedestrians and onlookers coming from the surrounding apartment towers observed the scene. The van in front of Chellish's car made no effort to move. Chellish got out and saw why. A Whistler, either unconscious or dead, lay on the ground next to the wreck and if the van had gone on, the whirling stream of compressed air under the vehicle would have severely maimed the victim further. One of the uniformed men recognized Chellish. He came over and said the obvious: "There's been an accident." "So I see," Chellish replied. "Don't worry about us. We can wait till everything is cleared up." "Oh no," the Whistler answered after the translator had transmitted Chellish's words. "We've got a car back there which can move freely. You won't have to wait if you want to take it." Chellish agreed. Mullon and the escort

left the car. The police car was parked at the curb far enough back to let it turn around and drive off on the other side of the street. Mullon and the agent got into the car and when Chellish opened the door on the other side to get behind the wheel he heard Mullon cry out in surprise. Chellish turned around and saw 3 uniformed Whistlers sitting on the back seat. They had taken Mullon and their friend between them. They must have been hiding behind the seat, Mullon thought, and he suddenly realized that they had walked into a trap. The 3 policemen held their ultrasonic weapons ready to shoot. "Drive back to the palace of His Excellency!" one of them ordered. "Don't try to do anything foolish. We know that you're dangerous and we won't take any chances." Chellish wanted to protest but then he thought that it was probably useless. They must have had compelling reasons for the arrest and the longer he thought about it the more he became convinced that he knew what it was; there must have been a listening bug in the vehicle they had used before. How stupid that he didn't think of it sooner! He should have known that it wasn't enough to check only the first vehicle they got after their landing on Heeninniy. With resignation Chellish started the car, turned around and drove to the palace. He and Mullon were put in a narrow windowless cell which contained no furniture. The cell was located in one of the towers which were part of Iiy-Juur-Eelie's palace. It was far away from the residential tower where Chellish and his companions had been housed as privileged guests of His Excellency. The incarceration took place without any formalities. Their weapons were taken away and there was nothing they could do to prevent it. Their jailers refused to answer their questions about O'Bannon, Milligan and their other friends. Nor were they told what would happen to themselves. The cell received a little light from a fixture which was built high up in between the wall and the ceiling. "Fine pickle we're in," Mullon muttered, just to be saying something. "We really stepped into this one." "You can say that again," Chellish said gloomily. "I just wonder where Iiy-Juur-Eelie wants to go from here. He must be miserably scared that our fleet will zoom in on Heeninniy in a few hours or days and make it hot as hell for him." "Not necessarily," Mullon contradicted. "After all he has caught us in the act of high treason or whatever they call it." "That may be a sufficient reason in the eyes of their people but not for us," Chellish insisted. "If it were indeed the case that our warships were lurking in the background to retaliate against him, they would hardly wait till Iiy-Juur-Eelie submits all the justification and proof for his action." Chellish glanced around to see if he could detect any listening bugs but he was unable to find one in the bare room. "Iiy-Juur-Eelie must expect to get some advantage from our arrest," Chellish concluded. "However the way the situation appears to me, it'll be a long time before we find out what he's got up his sleeve." "I feel sorry for our escort," Mullon changed the subject. "They'll probably make short shrift of the poor devil." "I wouldn't be too sure about that. The conspirators have more than one man in the Secret Service. Maybe another one can help him fly the coop." Mullon stared at the ceiling and mumbled: "Maybe!" Fij-Gul finally gave Wee-Nii his report. Wee-Nii listened with great interest but when Fij-Gul came to the point of drawing some conclusions from his observations, the Presidential Chamberlain issued instructions to occupy the vessel of the aliens with at least 200 men. He gave no further explanation for the order. Wee-Nii was aghast, wondering what made Iiy-Juur-Eelie so bold as to seize the foreign ship in broad daylight and to violate all the rules of diplomacy which would entail dire consequences. Wee-Nii tried to learn from the Presidential Chambers what had happened in the meantime but they pretended to know nothing. Therefore Wee-Nii passed on the order to Fij-Gul, giving him the feeling for the 2nd time in a short span of time that he was stuck with all the disagreeable jobs. Fij-Gul summoned the airport guard company and marched with it to the alien ship which stood calm and mighty on its landing pad. He peered with suspicion and anxiety at the many hatches in the hull, expecting them to open up and spew out a consuming fire or a hail of bullets. However nothing stirred. When Fij-Gul and his soldiers had approached the vessel

within 100 meters, an aircushion car roared in from the edge of the landing field. 2 officers alighted and Fij-Gul recognized them as the technicians whose job it was to open the airlock of the foreign spaceship. "To be honest," Sheldrake growled, "there are too many of them. Look at them! There are at least 200 men and I don't see any of our people among them." Krahl and Loewy stared apprehensively at the observation screen. They saw the aircushion car glide in over the field and stop 100 meters from the Fair Lady. Two men got out and walked toward the ship. "These are the break-in specialists," Sheldrake commented. "They're trained to open all types of airlocks." Loewy pointed to the picture panel. "What are we going to do about the others? Shall we let 'em all in?" "I don't want to commit suicide," Sheldrake grunted, getting into the pilot seat. "Something must have happened to Chellish and the others or the Whistlers wouldn't dare to send out the guards against us. We're on our own and have to use our own judgment. Perhaps it would be good to have 2 hostages." Sheldrake pushed a number of switches and listened with satisfaction to the deep hum which came from the belly of the ship. Meanwhile the 2 technicians had reached the airlock and had disappeared from the picture under the curvature of the hull. A few moments later an alarm buzzer warned that the outer airlock hatch had been opened. The company of Whistlers with the officer leading them now had come within 80 meters of the spacecraft. Sheldrake watched them with a scornful grin and after they had advanced another 20 meters, he slammed down a lever on the panel above the pilot console. The hum in the ship's belly swelled and outside- Fij-Gul saw the airlock open up after the technicians had manipulated something at the outer wall of the ship. He noticed that the airlock was empty and felt relieved. Among the many contradictory thoughts which churned in his mind during the last few minutes he wanted to cling to the one that Iiy-Juur-Eelie-although stern and abrasive-was certainly no fool and he wouldn't be so rash as to embark on any irrational or irresponsible action. Iiy-Juur-Eelie must know what he was doing. This feeling made little sense but it reassured Fij-Gul nonetheless and he led his men with new confidence toward the ship. Suddenly it seemed to him as if the air had begun to flicker in front of his eyes. He blamed his tenseness for the impression and wiped his eyes as he kept up his pace. Then he bumped into an obstacle. As he had marched very fast, he was thrown back by the impact. He staggered and fell to the ground. A few soldiers rushed to his side and helped him to get back on his feet. He could see in their faces that they were just as flabbergasted by the incident as he himself. Incredulously and with outstretched arms he approached the spot where he had been so abruptly stopped for a 2nd time. There was nothing to be seen except the ship about 50 meters away. The air was clear although it still flickered in a peculiar way. He flinched as his hands touched an invisible obstacle. He uttered a cry and dropped his arms as if he had suffered an electric shock. He quickly raised his hands again to touch what was in the air before him. Meanwhile the guard company had broken its ranks. The soldiers crowded around him, curious and incredulous, ran into the invisible wall, screamed and fell back. Fij-Gul found to his amazement that he was unable to grasp the ephemeral object with his fingers. There was something in the middle of the air, a strange, invisible object which blocked his way. Yet his fingers found nothing but air. It was not a material substance which could be touched. Fij-Gul slowly regained his cold reasoning. He was an officer and a highly trained man. It seemed plausible to him that the aliens mastered a force which could erect a protective field around their ship so that they could deny access to anyone and anything they wanted to keep out. There was nothing miraculous about it. Such experiments had already been begun on Heeninniy although they had so far not met with success. By this time the technicians who had waited at the airlock had noticed that something was awry. When Fij-Gul waved to them they came over. Fij-Gul shouted that an invisible weapon existed in the air between them and heard their reply: "You don't make sense!" As Fij-Gul noted, the protective screen presented no bar to sound waves. The technicians kept walking toward Fij-Gul with their belief

unshaken. They suddenly were stopped in their tracks as if struck by lightning. Reeling back they tumbled to the ground. Fij-Gul grimaced. "I warned you," he called out to them. "Looks like you're caught in a trap." He tamed to his soldiers and instructed them to walk around the ship and investigate if they could find a gap in the invisible wall. His order was only reluctantly obeyed. The soldiers were deadly afraid of the inexplicable phenomenon. The two technicians repeated the attempts Fij-Gul had made to discover something about the nature of the barrier but they had no more success than he. "Perhaps it would be better if you looked around in the ship to see if you can deactivate the field," Fij-Gul finally suggested. "The ship is probably swarming with the aliens and you want us to go in there?" Fij-Gul reminded them of his rank. "Of course you! It's plain to see that we can't do it. Besides, we know that the ship is empty. The field has probably been switched on automatically." He didn't believe his own words since he had not experienced such a block on his mission the first night he penetrated into the spaceship. The technicians walked glumly back to the airlock under the watchful eyes of Fij-Gul who saw them draw their weapons and climb into the hatch. Then he lost sight of them in the darkness of the airlock chamber. The soldiers he had sent to circle the ship returned from the other side. Their eyes were full of horror but they had followed his orders and determined that the barrier showed no gap in its periphery. They were shut out and if the technicians didn't succeed in finding the mechanism which controlled the field, they would forever remain outside. Forever? Fij-Gul suddenly remembered his earlier observation that sound waves were able to penetrate the field. They could bombard the ship with sonicannons! However the question was: of what use would be a demolished ship? Fij-Gul posted the guard company around the ship and put a sergeant in charge of the company. Then he returned to Wee-Nii to submit his report. Chellish pulled at the strap which bound him to the strange chair-not because he hoped to free himself in this manner but only to be doing something. They had taken him out of his cell and brought him into this bare room whose only equipment consisted of a dim light, a few switch panels and this chair. The chair was fitted with levers, buttons and contacts which made it easy to guess that it was one of those instruments used in modem times instead of red-hot tongs and iron maidens to pry secrets from recalcitrant prisoners. There were two Whistlers in the room besides Chellish. One was Gii-Yeep whom Chellish had already seen once before and whom he remembered because he had a distinctive scar across his left cheek. He didn't know the other one. Gii-Yeep carried a translator on a strap around his neck. He planted himself in front of Chellish and said: "We're going to ask you a few questions and I hope you're smart enough to answer them at once." Chellish stared into his face and didn't utter a word. Gii-Yeep continued: "What type of forcefield surrounds your ship like an invisible wall?" Chellish sighed with relief. Sheldrake and his two boys had been on the ball. The Fair Lady was protected and all the cannons and bombs of the Whistlers couldn't smash through the defence screen and damage their precious ship. He gave no inkling of the relief he felt and continued to stare at Gii-Yeep without answering his question. The other Whistler disappeared from his view and after a certain time had elapsed since Gii-Yeep's first question he heard the click of a switch and simultaneously felt an electric shock which brought tears of pain and anger to his eyes. However he kept silent. Gii-Yeep asked his question a 2nd time and when he failed to elicit the desired result the other Whistler sent a sustained current with prolonged shocks through his entire body. It wasn't so bad, Chellish thought; the pain was much worse the first time. "What are you waiting for?" Gii-Yeep asked irately when he saw that his method brought no results. "I'm waiting for your explanation," Chellish said condescendingly. "I want to know why you keep me here, where my companions are and what you want to do with us. Didn't it occur to you idiots that our fleet will show up in a few hours with 500 ships to turn all of Heeninni into a heap of ashes? First answer these questions and then I'll see if I can answer yours." Gii-Yeep gave no sign of intimidation and he replied

calmly: "You're here because you've committed high treason and your companions are also under arrest. I tell you this only to show you that your stubborn attitude is not going to help you a bit. We don't have to question you. I'm sure that one of your friends will be easier persuaded to give us the information we want. I can't tell you what will happen to you after the interrogation because I've got nothing to do with that. And as far as your fleet is concerned, let us worry about it. We know how to defend ourselves." None of this was news to Chellish. He had used the time to collect his thoughts. An idea occurred to him which fascinated him more and more. Would he be able to deceive a man like Gii-Yeep and the scientists of the Whistlers? "Are you ready to answer my question?" Gii-Yeep insisted. "What kind of a forcefield did you set up around your ship?" Chellish hesitated. The second Whistler had lost his patience and dealt another severe electric shock to Chellish who writhed in pain and screamed: "Stop it! Wait a minute! It's an antigravity field." "Explain it to me!" "The kinetic energy of an object which is about to penetrate the field will be absorbed instantly upon touching it." "How do you produce such a field and how do you eliminate it?" Chellish hesitated again. This time his whole body was electrified again which he found somewhat more tolerable than the discharge through his larynx. "Good grief!" he groaned. "Do you want me to explain all the technology involved in an artificial field of gravitation?" Gii-Yeep made an affirmative gesture. "That's the least you must do. The man at the switch panel is our best expert. He'll take notes of what you tell us." "Do you want to build an antigrav aggregate?" Chellish inquired. "That's none of your business," Gii-Yeep rebutted sharply. "Oh yes it is. I must know what sources of energy you have available. A single antigrav-field uses more energy than a big city." Gii-Yeep glanced at the Whistler at the switch panel. "Can this be correct?" he asked him. Apparently the technician made a confirming gesture because Gii-Yeep turned again to his prisoner. "We produce energy with atomic fission reactors," he enlightened Chellish. "We also have a few experimental reactors in operation which use the atomic fusion process but they're not very efficient up to now." Chellish pointed out: "Assuming that you want to create a field which would counterbalance our protective shield you would need an output of 10 billion megawatts. Can you generate that much?" Gii-Yeep retorted with a derisive expression: "If you think that we'll be cowed by big figures, you've got another think coming. If we find that you're giving us the correct advice, we'll make the 10 billion megawatts available." "Well," Chellish sighed, "but you don't have the equipment to generate such a field." "That's where you come in!" "No!" Chellish called out emphatically and almost at the same moment he yelled in torment because the technician turned on the voltage to go through his throat and his body together. "You're going to help us with the project," Gii-Yeep declared. "No!" Chellish screamed full of anger. "Never!" This time the two discharges caused him to lose consciousness for a few seconds. When he regained his senses a storm raged in his head. However he was undaunted. He was not yet willing to give in. They had to repeat the torture 4 more times and after fainting for the 5th time, he stammered: "Alright... I'll tell you everything... but give me... something to drink!" Iiy-Juur-Eelie's plan had been born on the spur of the moment but when His Excellency later re-examined it, it seemed to him to be without a flaw and very promising. He had ordered the installation of the listening device in the vehicles of his guests not because he suspected them of any wrongdoing. An automobile seemed to be a good place to put in a bug. He didn't expect the strangers to search the cars as thoroughly as their rooms and it was possible that his visitors would discuss some matters on their trips which were important to him and which he could not hope to learn in any other way. It was a pure accident that he had discovered on the first trip after placing the secret microphones in their cars that the aliens conspired with the insurgents. It was this accident which caused Iiy-Juur-Eelie to devise his far-reaching plans on the spot which-to his mind-were conceived with cleverness. Naturally he feared the fleet of the aliens but he refused

to believe that they would attack and destroy Heeninniy without warning. After all he held 10 prisoners as hostages and, moreover, he could prove that they had violated the rules of diplomacy by collaborating with the illegal opposition and contributing to the overthrow of his regime. These were reasons whose validity the foreign fleet, if it came to Heeninniy, could not deny. Nevertheless he would be forced to surrender the prisoners and the relations between Heeninniy and Aurigel would be tense right from the beginning. But in the meantime the aliens could be interrogated. Gii-Yeep was just the man to make them talk and to get the needed answers in a hurry. Unfortunately his first strike against the ship after the arrest of the aliens had ended in failure. Fij-Gul had been unable to occupy the vessel with his soldiers and the two technicians who entered the ship had apparently disappeared for good. After this incident nobody could say with certainty if the ship was empty and the protective shield functioned automatically or if the aliens had left hidden guards on the ship. In the latter case one would have to assume that they all had fallen asleep on the job when Fij-Gul went aboard the first time and if this was true the danger would be greater now. There was also another matter which bothered His Excellency. That morning a signal had been intercepted which had been transmitted from the airport of the capital. It was a very strong electromagnetic radio signal and it seemed to be beamed in the same direction as the mysterious radio message which had been sent from the alien ship to Feejnee two days ago. However this time it was not a full message but only a single signal. Gii-Yeep's radio technicians stood ready to track down the transmitter as soon as it repeated the signal a 2nd time. The matter was very baffling as the radio technicians considered it impossible that the signal could have been beamed from the ship itself. But then, who else could have done it? Had the insurgents already taken a hand in the game? Had they taken over the job of warning the alien fleet on Feejnee now that his prisoners were unable to do it themselves? And of all aggravating things, those obnoxious rebels! Iiy-Juur-Eelie had almost become apoplectic when he learned that one of his Secret Service agents belonged to the insurgents. He immediately demanded a rigorous investigation of all members of the Secret Service. But this was not the most important problem at the moment. The interrogation of the prisoners took precedence. The insurrectionist caught red-handed was also in jail and awaited the verdict of a special tribunal. The President-King had dispatched a spaceship under Capt. Niij-Seem's command to Feejnee. Niij-Seem was a man on whom His Excellency could depend. He had been given instructions for various contingencies and he would carry them out to the letter-if he could reach Feejnee unmolested which Wee-Nii, for instance, found hard to believe. Iiy-Juur-Eelie now regretted that he had been too hasty in granting permission to Admiral Wee-Nii for sending another-his last-spaceship to Weelie-Wee. Niij-Seem or the Defence Forces of the planet could have made much better use of a second warship and in case of emergency the necessary food rations for the fleet could have been provided without the grain shipment from Weelie-Wee, although it would require stricter rationing for the whole planet. However, while Iiy-Juur-Eelie kept pondering a decision to revoke his permission, the spaceship, which had taken off for Weelie-Wee under the command of Capt. See-Kee, moved out of the radio range of the territorial stations and could no longer be contacted. Iiy-Juur-Eelie hoped that See-Kee was a more capable commander than Sey-Wuun of whom nothing more had been heard. Man and ship would have to be written off as lost if they didn't return in the next 100 days. Iiy-Juur-Eelie resolved to take a good look at Weelie-Wee and its strange inhabitants as soon as the altercation with Aurigel was over. If it turned out that the people of Weelie-Wee were responsible for the loss of his ship, they would have to pay dearly for it, he vowed. His Excellency reflected on his strategy, sitting in his study, a spacious hall high up in the tower which formed the front end of the wedge-shaped tower complex. From here he had an excellent view over the whole palace as well as over a good part of the city. It was the nerve centre of his communications with his highest officials, the

governors, generals and admirals of Heeninniy, with whom he kept in constant touch. Here he also received the news that the prisoner who called himself something like Tschee-Liisch had begun to make a confession, or rather that he explained to the expert Wiir-Nee how the protective screen around their ship had been produced and how it could be made inactive. Here he further received the information shortly thereafter that the imprisoned partisan had escaped from his cell and disappeared without a trace. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was outraged and he swore that the guilty would be severely punished. However he was far less concerned about the escape at the moment than the grilling of the prisoner Tschee-Liisch. If Wiir-Nee didn't botch his job, he could make his victim divulge his secrets and they might be able to begin the construction of the field generators the report mentioned in a few hours. . . . Chellish went over in his mind again what he had said and concluded that his statements had been astute. It wasn't easy to give a well-trained specialist instructions for the building of equipment and to convince him that it would enable him to produce artificial gravitation fields-whereas Chellish had not the slightest intention of surrendering so cheaply one of the most important secrets of Terra's technology. Chellish had described an apparatus with details that presumably promised to deliver what they expected. He had done it in such a circumspect way that a technician who had never worked with artificial gravitation fields before would be unable to find fault with it. Nevertheless there was a catch. It was so tiny as to be unnoticeable to the Whistlers and yet it would insure at the decisive moment that they would fail to reap the fruits of their success. Chellish had been given some food after his ordeal and put back into his cell. Wiir-Nee, who now almost seemed to consider him a colleague, had held out the prospect that they would begin the construction of the antigrav-aggregate as soon as possible and would probably have to consult him again. Chellish, pretending to feel contrite, gave him to understand that he would be at his disposal. During his absence Mullon had spent a few agonizing hours. He had guessed that Chellish would be questioned but his fears had been based on erroneous conjectures. "No," Chellish explained, "they didn't want to know what it looks like on Aurigel and I didn't tell them that we're really from Grautier. Instead I have described in detail how an antigrav machine functions so that they can nullify the effect of the protective shield Sheldrake has put around the Fair Lady and force their way into the ship." Mullon stared at him, thunderstruck. "You betrayed that to them?" he gasped. "Of course, they had their methods to make me talk." Staggering back to the wall Mullon groaned: "But... please! Of course it would be asking too much for you to stand up to the methods of the Secret Service without opening your mouth!" Chellish smiled. "Take it easy! I opened my big mouth alright; but the Whistlers won't get much satisfaction from the thing I described to them." Mullon was dumbfounded and wanted to ask something but at this moment the cell door was opened. A Whistler in uniform came in and said: "I hope we're going to have a pleasant trip!" Chellish was so occupied with his thoughts that he was puzzled for a few seconds by the odd greeting. Finally he grasped its meaning and said breathlessly: "You... You... you're one of the guerrillas?" "Quite right," was the reply. "And I want to help you to get out of here." Chellish quickly regained his calmness. "I wouldn't know what help I'd appreciate more," he said coolly. "But where shall we go and what will happen to our other men?" The Whistler had it all figured out. "I'll be in charge of this cell block for the next 2 hours. This ought to be enough time to set your friends free. We can hide in the cellar of the tower until it gets dark. Then a few of our supporters will come to lead us out." "Us?" Chellish asked in surprise. "Do you want to leave together with us?" "Of course, I've got to. They'll find out that I was the one who let you escape." "Fine, let's go. Are all our men held in this same block?" "Yes. In the adjoining cells." Mullon still stood motionlessly at the rear wall of the cell. He looked like a man who couldn't believe his luck and was too slow in reacting to the sudden change of his situation. Chellish had to push him out of the cell. In the corridor the Whistler hastily whispered further

information. In his opinion it would be almost impossible to get back the weapons which had been taken away from them. The Secret Service kept them in a safe to which only Gii-Yeep and a few members of his inner circle had access. But the partisan-whose name was Luun-Syr-believed that he could get hold of four or more ultrasonic pistols in addition to his own and this was more than Chellish could have dreamed. The high and narrow corridor was quiet and dimly lit. The doors to the prison cells were located at equal spaces of 3 meters at the right side of the corridor and the opposite wall was even and smooth. Luun-Syr opened the adjacent cell with some kind of a rod which, so he said, possessed a mysterious magnetic force that alone could unlock the complicated mechanism of the doors. Chellish assumed that it was an electronic impulse device to which the door locks were attuned. As the door slid aside they saw O'Bannon and Milligan sitting on the floor facing each other and playing a game in which the right arm was moved around while the fingers formed figures that had to be guessed by the other player before he could stop the arm. It was a simple game which apparently had been invented by O'Bannon to demonstrate to the Whistlers whenever they entered their cell that they could go to hell. "Cut it out, you jokers!" Chellish muttered impolitely. "Is this the best you can think of?" O'Bannon jumped up. "Chellish...!" he exclaimed. "Mullon! Is everything in order?" "If you keep shouting like this," Chellish hissed, "nothing will be in order. This good man Luun-Syr will help us to break out. We'll have to be nice and quiet; so watch it! Come on, we want to get the others." Chellish had to pass out more admonishments till everybody was freed. Their joy was greater than their caution. Each time two other cellmates realized that their confinement was over, they cried out with enthusiasm. Luun-Syr prudently locked the cell doors again so that their flight would not be discovered prematurely. Then Chellish sent him to the guardroom to secure the ultrasonic pistols. In the meantime Chellish and his men put their heads together. "Luun-Syr suggested that we hide in the cellar until it get dark," Chellish explained. "Then the partisans will come to rescue us. I don't think it's a very good idea because they'll search the entire building as soon as they discover that we're missing and this will include the cellar too. We don't stand much of a chance against the whole Secret Service. But there is a place where they won't look for us: the floor where the ruler himself lives. Of course there'll be a lot of guards all over the place but if we can get there before they find out that we've vanished from the prison it's a good bet that we can overwhelm the guards... and perhaps even seize the big pinhead himself." Some of the men considered it an excellent plan but others were afraid that it was too bold. Among the latter was O'Bannon who grumbled: "Why don't we try to break out at once and reach the Fair Lady. If we manage to get aboard they can't do a thing to us." Chellish responded grimly: "Wonderful! And how do you propose we can do it? The Whistlers have surrounded the ship with guards. The Secret Service has taken all our equipment away from us. We can't even send a simple signal to the Fair Lady. No, buddy, it's not a good idea." O'Bannon had to admit that Chellish's arguments were right and they soon agreed to proceed according to Chellish's plan. Then Luun-Syr returned, loaded with 6 ultrasonic pistols. Chellish distributed the weapons and told the Whistler about his plan. Luun-Syr reacted similarly to O'Bannon. At first he voiced objections but he was quickly convinced that there was no better approach. "Very good," Chellish concluded with satisfaction, "then let's get started right away. Which is the best way to go to the main tower?" Luun-Syr pointed along the corridor. "Down there are the elevator shafts," he explained. "We can take one of the elevators and go up to the bridges. If we find one with little traffic we can be in the main tower in half an hour." Chellish agreed and turned to his men. "We've got 6 pistols now and they should be enough to reach our goal if we're careful and have a little luck." With these words Chellish marched his little band forward. 7/ AMNESTY? Fij-Gul had given his report to Wee-Nii and then returned to his company of men. He expected to find the two technicians back at the barrier or at least to see some sign of them. But such

was not the case. Deeply bewildered and with growing anxiety Fij-Gul had stood guard with his company at the periphery of the protective shield and he was relieved after 5 hours of duty. Meanwhile an idea had occurred to him. As soon as he was relieved he went back to the Record Office again and asked an attendant to bring him the two instruments which translated the languages of the Weelie-Wee colonists and the people of Aurigel. Now that he sat in front of the instruments the task he was about to tackle seemed more difficult and even if he were successful he still didn't know whether it would turn his suspicion into certainty. All he knew was that the aliens from Aurigel pronounced the name of their spaceship like Feeh-Leh-Dii but to obtain the desired answer from the translators he had to pronounce these words himself and he had no reliable method to judge what source of errors would be introduced by his faulty pronunciation. Finally he hit upon an idea. He knew that Feeh-Leh-Dii meant something similar to 'Lovely Woman'. Therefore he spoke the words "Lovely Woman" in his own language into the Aurigel translator and waited till the instrument performed the translation with perfect enunciation. He listened carefully to the sound and it seemed to him that the name of the alien ship was indeed taken from the Weelie-Wee language and was not an original word of the Aurigel race. This was exactly what had puzzled him during his reflections and why he sought to alleviate his suspicion and ascertain the true facts. Then he placed the microphone of the Weelie-Wee set before the loudspeaker of the Aurigel translator. In this manner he avoided the necessity of speaking the foreign language himself. Then he said for a 2nd time: "Lovely Woman!" He waited anxiously to see how the Weelie-Wee translator would react to the input. If the words Feeh-Leh-Dii actually originated from the Weelie-Wee idiom the Weelie-Wee translator would have to transmit the Whistlers' words for 'Lovely Woman'. His breathless tension was rewarded when the Weelie-Wee instrument picked up the words from the Aurigel translator and clearly pronounced in the Whistler's own language: "Lovely Woman!" Fij-Gul was stunned although this was precisely what he had expected to happen. He forced himself to go over his train of thoughts again and could find no mistake. If the aliens from Aurigel had given their ship a name which stemmed from the Weelie-Wee language, then the probability was very great that they didn't come from Aurigel-if such a world existed at all-but from Weelie-Wee. And this was something he had to report to His Excellency as quickly as possible. So it all had been a hoax! They had boasted of their fleet's invincible might and the high level of their technology in order to instil in him and to divert his attention from Weelie-Wee to the legendary world of Aurigel which probably didn't even exist. Somehow they must have overwhelmed Sey-Wuun and captured or demolished his ship before coming to Heeninniy to finish their work so that the 8000 miserable and primitive settlers would have peace and quiet. Quiet! He would make them quiet! Iiy-Juur-Eelie didn't doubt for a moment that Fij-Gul's hunch was right. He dismissed Fij-Gul after promising him that he would promote him to Colonel at the next occasion and he informed Gii-Yeep that he wanted to see the prisoners at once in his office. Yes-all of them! He pictured in his mind their mortification when he told them to their faces where they came from and accused them of lying. He would ridicule them and gloat in their fury and helplessness. He would drag them before his people and they would pour their scorn on them. He would... He was interrupted by Gii-Yeep's call. His voice sounded hysterical as he shrieked: "The prisoners have escaped, Your Excellency!" "Damn it! Shoot at it if you can't break the switch panel!" Walsh nodded, raised his pistol and blasted the switch panel. The awesome energy of the ultrasonic pistol ripped the metal plate apart and turned the wires and connections behind it to dust. The elevator cabin was stuck and nobody would be able to move it until the wiring was repaired. Five elevator shafts led up to the highest floor of the main tower and to block them meant to frustrate the adversary's ability to move in on them very quickly. If the elevators were out of operation, their foe had to come up the stairs and the only staircase leading up to Iiy-Juur-Eelie's private quarters

on the highest floor could easily be defended by 3 men, at least as long as until the ruler had been captured. Then all attacks should cease because it would endanger the life of his august personality. However they hadn't reached that point as yet. There were still several guards in the upper corridors who were unaware of the trouble which threatened them. Nor did they know below and in the other towers where the fugitives had gone. So far everything had come off almost without a hitch. They had already run into 15 Whistlers whom they had to knock out and tie up to keep them from spreading what they had seen. None of the 15 had dared to offer resistance when they pointed the funnel-shaped pistol barrels at them. They had accomplished the move from the adjacent to the main tower without being noticed and now in Iiy-Juur-Eelie's own quarters, where he dictated absolute quiet, the danger of detection was even less. Luun-Syr told them that they had reached the 150th floor and since there were only 156 floors in the tower they were almost close enough to their goal to touch it, although the question remained whether Iiy-Juur-Eelie actually was in one of his rooms. After they obstructed the elevators on the 150th floor they left Milligan, Walsh and Everdon behind as guards. The 3 men took up position at the top of the stairs leading down to the next floor and had every intention of making it as hard as possible for anyone who tried to ascend the steps. Two more men, Farnway and McLeigh, were assigned to maintain liaison with the 3 in the rear and to give them any information they might require. But first they accompanied Chellish and the others as they pushed upwards. The main corridor of the 151st floor was completely empty except for a single sentry who leaned in a casual manner against the wall on the landing of the stairs. He failed to notice the men who sneaked up the flight of stairs and began to move only when Chellish threw a coin far down into the corridor so that it made a clacking noise which aroused his curiosity. Chellish and Mullon quickly jumped up and noiselessly followed the sentry who was seized, bound and gagged before he could reach the coin. They put the Whistler down near the stairs since there was little likelihood that he would be detected by his comrades. The situation on the next floor was the same. For a 2nd time a coin thrown into the corridor caused the guard to leave his post in order to investigate the noise. He was grabbed by Chellish and Mullon just as noiselessly as the Whistler before him and tied and gagged. The guard on the 153rd floor suffered the same ignoble fate. Chellish began to hope that they could gain just as easily access to the highest floor but when they approached the 154th floor, they heard a lot of shouting from below. The Whistlers had discovered that the elevators were stuck and since they must already have learned that the prisoners were loose it wasn't hard to guess who was to blame for it and where to look for the fugitives. Chellish saw another sentry appear over the railing. However there was no time to put him out of action without being seen. Chellish pulled out his weapon and fired a shot. The guard silently collapsed across the railing. "Run up!" Chellish shouted. "They know what they're up against!" The shouting below grew louder. They could hear banging and running as well as Milligan bellowing: "Don't let 'em get out!" Meanwhile Chellish rushed up the stairs. At the other end of the corridor he saw a group of 3 guards. He dropped to the floor and started to shoot them up. One shot hissed close over his head but then his weapon took its toll and the Whistlers crumpled to the floor where they remained motionless. Down below the noise had faded away. Only once did he hear Milligan's roaring voice: "We're holding them back! Go and get the old man!" Chellish grinned as he darted up the last flight of stairs with all the vigour he could muster. He had expected that the top floor where Iiy-Juur-Eelie lived would be the most difficult to invade. But strangely he met no resistance as he reached the top of the stairs with his men. They ducked and peered down the empty corridor. The office of the despot was located at the far end and the door was half-open. Behind the door knelt a few guards who held their weapons ready to shoot. Chellish cautiously raised the barrel of his pistol over the edge of the last step and took careful aim. At the moment one of the Whistlers noticed him he pulled the

trigger with a scattered shot, tearing a gap in the line of guards. The uninjured ones retreated deeper into the room and took cover behind the doors. Chellish was satisfied to see that the defenders knew nothing about tactics. They seemed to think that it would be easy for them to repulse him when he tried to reach the door to the office through the corridor. But of course he didn't come alone. He had seven Terrans at his side and each one now held two weapons in his hands. The corridor was wide enough for their array side by side and Chellish marched toward the entrance under the protective fire of his comrades. The two door wings turned into brown dust under the ultrasonic energy. The large room lay open before Chellish and he saw the last of Iiy-Juur-Eelie bodyguards seek cover behind tables and chairs. But the one person he didn't see was the tyrant. Chellish kept advancing. When he paused under the wide door, flanked by his comrades, the last of the bodyguards came out from their hiding places and threw away their weapons. They stretched their arms straightforward as a sign of capitulation and they no longer held weapons. Chellish made them leave the room and put them in O'Bannon's custody. O'Bannon took two more men to help him, and Chellish began to search the spacious room with the others. They found Iiy-Juur-Eelie cowering behind a huge piece of furniture. He trembled and his face was ash-grey. It never occurred to him that he could have taken a weapon like his bodyguards and defended himself. Chellish took Luun-Syr's translator and told the frightened man to come out. Iiy-Juur-Eelie obeyed immediately. Chellish let him sit down on a chair and asked Mullon to watch him. Then he sent Farnway and McLeigh down to Milligan with instructions to retreat to the highest floor. Milligan and his two men stationed themselves at the top of the staircase and kept the besieging Whistlers from moving up by giving them notice that any further attack would jeopardize the life of His Excellency. After order and quiet had been restored by this warning, Chellish began to talk to Iiy-Juur-Eelie. "We won't make many demands," he said calmly. "All we want is that you safeguard our departure by accompanying us and to give us your assurance that you won't take any retaliatory measures against our friends the partisans." Iiy-Juur-Eelie stared at Chellish without answering. "Well?" Chellish goaded him after awhile. The President-King seemed to awake from a state of deep thought. Suddenly his vacant eyes sprang to life again and he screeched in fury. "You don't have a chance, you idiot. We'll overrun Weelie-Wee and crush you lock, stock and barrel." Chellish didn't show the horrified shock that overcame him. "How do you know that we come from Weelie-Wee?" he inquired just as calmly as before. "We've our means of finding out your secrets," Iiy-Juur-Eelie retorted, foaming with rage when his adversary failed to give him the satisfaction of looking horrorstricken. "You should have been a little smarter when you picked a name for your ship." Of course, Chellish thought, how stupid! First we go to all the trouble of learning French flawlessly and then we chose an English name for the Fair Lady. "This doesn't change the situation one iota," he stated sharply. "We must leave Heeninniy without being molested and you'll have to accompany us so that our friends won't suffer your persecution. If your race ever decides to dare a hostile move against Weelie-Wee, which we call Grautier, you won't live to see it." Iiy-Juur-Eelie slumped forward. His rage seemed to have evaporated and turned into resignation. "You don't leave me any choice," he said softly. "I bow to your conditions." "You're acting very sensibly," Chellish answered. "We don't have any time to lose. Who must be notified of your decision in order to avoid any unpleasant incidents?" "Gii-Yeep," Iiy-Juur-Eelie murmured weakly. "Use the set over there. It'll connect you directly with him." The set didn't look unlike a telephone on Terra. Chellish lifted the receiver and Gii-Yeep answered in his unmistakable hissing voice. Chellish put the bilingual converter close to the set so that he got the translation: "The prisoners must be on the way to you, Excellency. I urgently request you..." Chellish interrupted him. "This is Chellish speaking. Iiy-Juur-Eelie is already in my power. Now listen to me, I've got something to tell you!" At first there was no response. The shock of the information must

have dazed Gii-Yeep. It took him awhile before he found his breath again. "I'm listening!" "The President-King has guaranteed us safe conduct," Chellish advised him. "I demand that you provide an escort for us that will take us safely and without delay to the airport. You'll force us to take the life of your ruler if you commit any overt action against us. Do you understand me?" Again there was silence at the other end. Chellish concentrated closely when Gii-Yeep finally began to speak again and he was made to realize that his strategy was miscalculated and all his efforts were in vain, because the Whistler declared: "I can't abide by the decision of His Excellency. As it was obviously made under duress I don't consider it as binding. I shall not furnish an escort for you and will do my best to surrender you to just punishment." Chellish had trouble keeping his composure. "I advise you to think over carefully what you're doing," Chellish urged. "The life of the President-King is in our hands. We have no wish to kill him but if you insist on harassing us..." "This is extremely regrettable," Gii-Yeep answered, "But there is apparently nothing I can do about it. You seem to forget that our government is not ruled by a despot. The Council of Ministers would never forgive me if I were to let the enemies of our world and our race get away for the sake of sparing the life of one man. Notwithstanding, I'm willing to offer you a compromise. Set His Excellency free and surrender without resistance. The Court will show you leniency for this conciliatory gesture when you're brought to trial." Chellish laughed bitterly. "Thanks for your advice," he jeered. "You didn't believe that we would accept it, did you?" "I'll be patient with you. Our side will do nothing for one hour. When the hour is up, I'll call you again and you must give me your final answer." It was all over! They were done for! They had played for high stakes and lost. After putting all their courage, determination and ingenuity on the scale, the balance had tipped to the other side. The predominance of an entire race had decided the outcome. Within reach of their goal, their plan had been inexorably thwarted. Their own as well as Grautier's situation was more than ever imperilled. Chellish looked at the grey-faced, frightened old man who cringed in his chair and looked small and miserable despite his height of 2.60 meters. Iiy-Juur-Eelie, who had ruled Heeninniy like a tyrant and at the bitter end, had learned that his subjects considered his life worth less than granting impunity to 10 enemies of the state. Mullon, O'Bannon and the rest of the men faced Gii-Yeep's decision with calmness. They had no illusions about the seriousness of their situation and they knew what was in store for them. They had not yet come to a conclusion but Chellish had no doubt that they would vote for the honourable resolution; namely, to defend themselves when the only other alternative was unconditional surrender. Chellish pulled himself out of his brooding. Something had to be done! They couldn't sit around and wait till the Whistlers started the attack. They had to occupy the strategic points of the floor and eliminate everything which could become a hazard to them. The Whistlers had doubtlessly put the elevators back in operation. Chellish assigned two men to the task of controlling the elevator shafts continuously and to snap the cables with their guns as soon as they started to move upward. Next he made an inspection of the extensive equipment in Iiy-Juur-Eelie's office. There were numerous instruments, telephones, videophones; intercoms and similar instruments. Chellish tested them but somebody had already cut off all connections before he got around to checking them. Only the line to Gii-Yeep was still open but nobody answered there either. This was the work of Gii-Yeep! Chellish grudgingly gave respect where it was due. The man had not only shown admirable circumspection at a dangerous moment but he had also disregarded the tradition of the personality cult which had fettered the politics of Heeninniy ever since Iiy-Juur-Eelie had taken over. He had probably severed the connections because he must have anticipated that his boss would attempt to summon help from other parts of the planet. Meanwhile O'Bannon had completed his task of posting the men at the important points of the floor. Chellish made the round and approved of his placements. Their position would enable them to keep the Whistlers at bay for

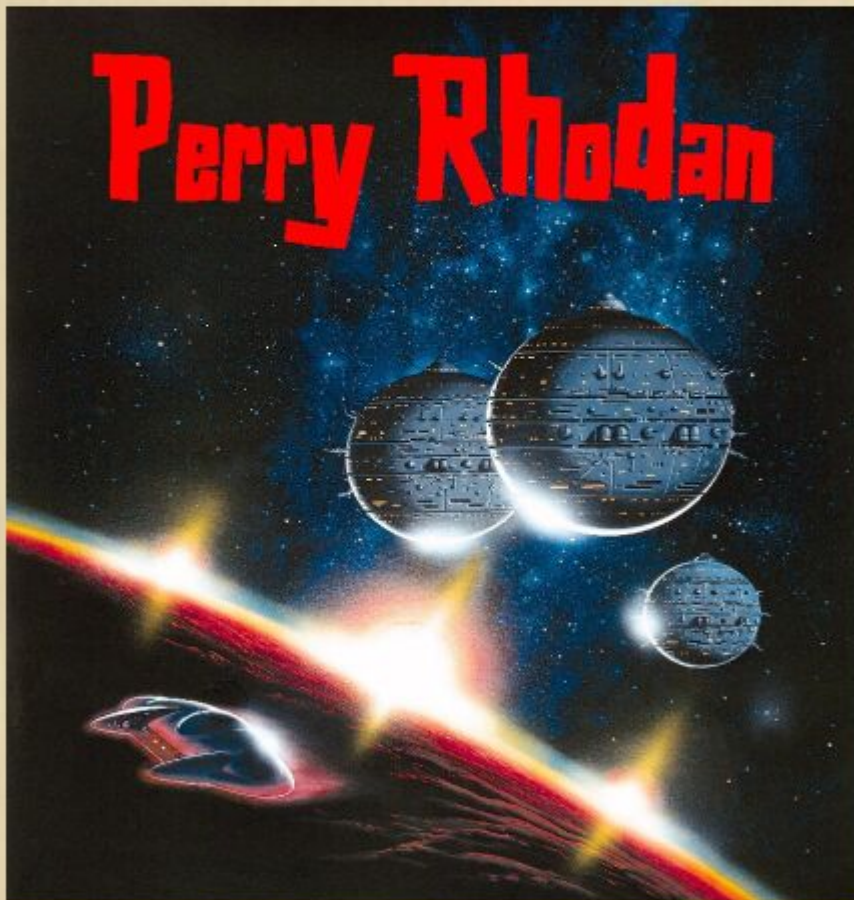
a few hours. Perhaps several hours of bloody fighting could induce even a tough man like Gii-Yeep to relent in his demand for unconditional surrender. If they succeeded in knocking out enough of his men, he would see the light and accept certain conditions. Almost 50 minutes had elapsed since the ultimatum. Chellish returned to Iiy-Juur-Eelie's office and waited for the telephone call from Gii-Yeep. "What did you decide?" "There's nothing to decide," Chellish answered grimly. "If you're not ready to obey our demands, you'll have to come and get us by force." Gii-Yeep hesitated a minute. "No conditions!" he proclaimed. "We're coming in!" "Why must you persist in behaving so unwisely?" Chellish tried a conciliatory tack again. "Why don't you want to contribute your part for the peaceful co-existence of two races in the universe..." "Two races?" Gii-Yeep exclaimed scornfully. "Are you calling your handful of people on Weelie-Wee a race?" He knows it too, Chellish thought. Well, why not? There was no reason to assume that Iiy-Juur-Eelie was the only one who knew the secret. "Nevertheless," Chellish began again. Suddenly he noticed that Gii-Yeep was no longer on the phone. The connection was still intact and he could hear a muted but highly excited conversation at the other end. Something seemed to have crossed up Gii-Yeep. But what? Or had he already given the order for the attack? Chellish waited impatiently with taut nerves. After about 5 minutes he heard the other receiver picked up again and Gii-Yeep's tense voice: "Wait a minute! Don't do anything!" Then Gii-Yeep put the receiver back and left Chellish up in the air and wondering what had happened. Suddenly he heard Milligan's wild, almost hysterical cry: "A ship! One of ours! It's the Solar System, boys...!" Milligan stood at the window and enthusiastically waved his arms as he shouted at the top of his lungs. Chellish dashed over to him and looked out the big window which gave a view across the city all the way to the airport. The tremendous body of a spherical ship descended at the airport—a ship huger than Heeninniy had ever seen before. A colossus of energy and firepower with a diameter of 200 meters! Chellish saw that Milligan was right. It was indeed the cruiser Solar System of the Terranian Spacefleet as he recognized from all unmistakable details! Now Chellish remembered what he had previously forgotten: Capt. Blailey had hinted earlier on Grautier that Terra planned to establish a base on Heeninniy for its Spacefleet. He didn't know the reason or its purpose but the information was obviously correct. That the invasion began just at the time when 10 Earthlings were in the most desperate peril of their lives on Heeninniy was a coincidence albeit an incredibly fortuitous accident destined to save their forfeited lives. Two more cruisers landed behind the Solar System. Chellish and his comrades watched the manoeuvre with tense elation. However their anxiety was not completely abated since the arrival of the ships didn't mean that they were already saved. Nobody aboard the Solar System and the two other cruisers was aware of their precarious situation and they had no way of contacting the ships, a fact which Gii-Yeep probably knew. Another miracle would be required to achieve their rescue—and it happened. Half an hour after the arrival of Terra's warships the contraption the technician Wiir-Nee had built according to Chellish's instruction for generating an artificial gravitation field exploded with the force of a small atom bomb. Wiir-Nee had performed the assembly of all parts, which had been constructed in utmost haste, at the southern outskirts of the city in the vicinity of the landing field. The explosion, which ensued when Wiir-Nee flicked the crucial switch, totally demolished two towers at the edge of the city and damaged many more. The Terranian ships considered the detonation a hostile act and immediately launched 5 auxiliary ships of the Gazelle type which hovered over the city with orders to stand by and observe the situation. In the meantime the Solar System had established communications with the Fair Lady and gathered all information about the events on Heeninniy. The blast of Chellish's contrivance served to speed things up considerably. Lt.-Col. Sikerman, who was in charge of the expedition, later admitted that he had originally intended to let a few hours go by before disembarking his first team in his effort to get in touch

with the local authorities. Now the picture had abruptly changed. Two Gazelles swooped down on the inner courtyard of the President-King's palace. They pressed their demand to talk to His Excellency. Gii-Yeep relinquished every thought of resistance when he learned that the intruders belonged to the same race as the 10 men he besieged up in the tower and, even worse, knew about the presence of their compatriots. Seldom had a commander of a spaceship been received with so much joy as Sikerman when he stepped out of the elevator of the main tower to announce personally to Chellish and his comrades that they were free. He briefly outlined the purpose of his mission. The Fleet needed a base in this sector of space which had heretofore been regarded as unimportant but now was rapidly becoming a focal point of Galactic politics. Then he insisted on hearing on the spot a detailed report about the venture of the Fair Lady and its crew. After Chellish had complied with his wish, Sikerman remained pensive and silent for awhile. Then he said with a chuckle: "I must say you're a veritable daredevil! If one considers how slim your chances for success were, you certainly made the most of them." Chellish and his mates returned to the Fair Lady. Lt.-Col. Sikerman insisted on henceforth carrying on the negotiations with the government of Heeninniy himself on behalf of the Solar Imperium. However it was not entirely clear who the government of Heeninniy was. Iiy-Juur-Eelie was forced to resign under the pressure of the circumstances and the Council of Ministers was dissolved by Gii-Yeep. There was every reason to believe that a legal opposition would flourish once more on Heeninniy and that the bitter interlude of underground activities by the guerrillas could finally cease. Chellish and his friends felt greatly relieved to be freed of their responsibilities. They took two days to recuperate from the rigours of their adventure and prepared to take off the 3rd day on their flight to Grautier. Lt.-Col. Sikerman had assured them that from now on Grautier would be under the protection of the Solar Imperium and that he would intercept the spaceship of the Whistlers which headed for Grautier before it was too late. Before departing, Sheldrake, Loewy and Krahl dug out the radio transmitter they had buried a few nights before in the ground under the landing field in order to confuse the defence forces of the planet by misleading signals. As they got ready for the liftoff, O'Bannon, Mullon and Milligan were in the Command Centre of the Fair Lady with Chellish. Chellish manipulated a few buttons and said whimsically: "How does it feel to be protected by the fleet of Terra after being banished from Earth?" Mullon grimaced. "Don't remind me! I wish we had known in the first place that we made fools of ourselves. We still could be living on Earth as decent, peaceful citizens." O'Bannon grunted in agreement and Chellish added cheerfully: "Perhaps there'll be an amnesty which will allow you to go back to Earth. You deserve it, in my opinion. I haven't seen anywhere a more stalwart and upright bunch of people than you." "Thank you," Mullon replied simply. The last hatch of the vessel rolled shut. The Fair Lady was ready to soar into space. The End



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